

Guardian newspaper reveals wider Internet surveillance

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The British *Guardian* newspaper, which first carried National Security Agency whistle-blower Edward Snowden's revelations of massive and illegal government spying, on Wednesday published a report by journalist Glenn Greenwald detailing the NSA's "widest-reaching" program for internet spying. The program, called XKeyscore, allows the intelligence agency to carry out everything from dragnet surveillance to the reading of the contents of individual emails.

The system allows intelligence agents to access, sort and monitor almost all Internet traffic anywhere in the world, including the specific content of communications. It can, for example, be used to generate lists of all people who visit any web site. Once such lists are compiled, nearly all of the Internet communications of the people listed can be intercepted.

The *Guardian's* report exposes as contemptible lies the official claim, repeated by President Obama, US intelligence chief James Clapper, top officials of the NSA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and both Democratic and Republican congressmen, that the NSA is not able to read the contents of individual communications without extensive legal oversight and review.

As the *Guardian* report makes clear, the sweeping and intrusive searches of "emails, social media activity and browsing history" made possible by the XKeyscore system require no prior authorization.

The exposure of the XKeyscore program follows earlier revelations, based on documents unveiled by Snowden, that the nation's major telephone companies routinely turn over all of their records of phone calls to the NSA, and that the agency operates a vast global Internet wiretapping system known as PRISM.

The report by the *Guardian* ran the same day that the

White House released previously classified documents, all highly redacted, including two reports on the NSA's "bulk collection program" and a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance (FISA) court order outlining procedures for monitoring domestic telephone calls. The administration claimed the documents showed that no eavesdropping could take place unless intelligence agencies first showed they had demonstrable suspicions, and that all such actions were subject to oversight by the FISA court.

The release of the documents is part of the administration's campaign of damage control and misinformation, aimed at confusing and dissipating popular opposition to the spying programs. It is meant to demonstrate "transparency" regarding secret programs that are routinely rubber-stamped by the secret FISA court, which stands outside of the regular judicial system.

Even if one were to assume that the NSA, FBI and other intelligence agencies actually abide by the procedures outlined in these documents—and they do not—that would not alter the fact that the warrantless, dragnet seizure of personal communications stands in flagrant violation of the Fourth Amendment to the US Constitution, which bars unreasonable and arbitrary searches and seizures.

The release of the documents was timed to coincide with a hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee into the domestic surveillance programs, in which a number of the committee's members sought to posture as critics, while signaling that they supported the continuation of the programs.

The hearing was yet another scripted, stage-managed love-fest between Congress and the intelligence agencies. Intended to demonstrate congressional oversight of the NSA and FBI, it was, in reality, part of

the official whitewash of the spying operations orchestrated by the White House with the complicity of both political parties and the media.

Testimony was provided by Deputy Attorney General James Cole, NSA Deputy Director John C. Inglis, and FBI Deputy Director Sean M. Joyce, all of whom gave worthless and false assurances that the surveillance programs were perfectly legal and posed no threat to democratic rights, while spouting the official line that they were essential to protecting the American people from terrorist attack.

Not a single senator from either party, in the course of a three-hour hearing, questioned the constitutionality of the surveillance programs.

The committee's chairman, Patrick Lehey of Vermont, after a few empty phrases about "transparency" and "oversight," concentrated his fire not on the illegality and undemocratic character of these programs, but on the failure of those who run them to prevent Edward Snowden from exposing their criminal nature to the American people.

Dianne Feinstein, the second-ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee and chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, published an op-ed piece in the *Washington Post* Wednesday entitled "Make NSA Programs More Transparent," in which she called for "changes to the NSA call-records program in an effort to increase transparency and improve privacy protections."

All of Feinstein's proposals, which include expanding the "ideological diversity" of the FISA court and more regular public disclosures of the number of telephone records being monitored, are entirely cosmetic, designed to create the illusion of public oversight while leaving the Big Brother spying programs intact.

Feinstein's op-ed parroted the White House lie that the programs are not intended to "listen to phone calls" and stressed that only a group of less than two dozen "highly vetted NSA analysts" have access to the data—as though that fact would serve to reassure the American people!

The threadbare pretenses of legality and oversight of the spy agencies were demolished by Wednesday's revelations in the *Guardian*, which underscore the ubiquitous character of the government's surveillance programs and the fact that intelligence agencies can

collect a vast array of private communications with the ease-of-use of an Internet search engine.

As the *Guardian* piece noted, "XKeyscore provides the technological capability, if not the legal authority, to target even US persons for extensive electronic surveillance without a warrant."

XKeyscore is the "widest-reaching" of the numerous digital data-gathering and mining systems in place at the NSA. It provides an interface for NSA intelligence agents to not only intercept single communications, but also to conduct massive database sweeps for the purpose of drawing up lists of suspects.

The program allows intelligence officials to conduct surveillance even when their targets are unknown, or are performing supposedly anonymous activity such as browsing the web. Unlike other systems, it does not require a "strong selector," such as an email address or IP address, to conduct surveillance.

Such a sweeping apparatus of domestic spying and, ultimately, repression is not known to have been implemented anywhere else in the world, even under the most repressive dictatorships. While the exact number of records recorded by the system is not known, it is likely to be in the range of billions every day.

Wednesday's revelations, and the response of the political establishment, underscore that there exists no opposition to the unchecked expansion of the US government's police powers within either the Democratic or Republican parties.



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