

Press leaks claim NSA collects “only” 30 percent of US phone calls

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10 February 2014

The political and media establishment is attempting to make hay out of new “leaks” which detail that the National Security Agency (NSA) collects roughly a third of the phone calls made in the United States.

In an article published Saturday, the *New York Times* said this collection was “a relatively small portion” of domestic calls. The *Washington Post* proclaimed that “the disclosure contradicts popular perceptions that the government is sweeping up all domestic data.”

The disclosure, which the *Post* says came from “current and former U.S. officials,” has all the features of a planted leak, released as a part of the Obama administration’s ongoing damage control efforts and published by the *Post* and the *Times* without question as to the veracity of the assertions. The articles more closely resemble administration press releases than products of investigative journalism.

Those “current and former U.S. officials” with knowledge of the NSA programs have given the public no reason to believe a word they say. NSA director Keith Alexander perjured himself before Congress when he said the NSA spying programs had thwarted over fifty terrorist attacks. James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, told Congress the flat-out lie that the NSA was not collecting data from domestic phone calls. The chief lawyer for the office of the Director of National Intelligence lied when he attempted to defend Clapper in the editorial pages of the *New York Times*.

For his part, President Obama told the nation in a January televised speech that “our intelligence community follows the law and is staffed by patriots” who “follow protocols to protect the privacy of ordinary people.”

But even if the figures presented in the *Times* and *Post* are to be believed—and there is good reason to dismiss them outright—it would be cold comfort that the

government “only” illegally seizes the data and content of a third of domestic phone calls. The use of a blanket warrant to seize the data and content of a single phone call between ordinary Americans is unconstitutional, let alone the seizure of data of tens of millions of phone calls daily.

And as the *Times* and *Post* admit, the only reason the government does not seize the content of 100 percent of domestic calls is that it does not have the technical capacity to do so. In 2006, officials claim that the government had the ability to gather data from 100 percent of domestic phone calls. Because of the rise in the number of calls, the government has since been playing catch-up.

As part of their effort to monitor all of the communications of the public, the Obama administration is now using the recent leak to advocate for an expansion of the secret spying programs. Administration officials told the *Times* that the primary goal is closing the “gap” between what the government currently collects and what it wants to collect. The *Times* writes that “it is, in fact, the agency’s goal to overcome technical hurdles that stop them from ingesting [all domestic calls].”

The *Times* cites “one official” from the Obama administration who said that “we should have a debate about how effective would it be [sic] if it were fully implemented.”

Nancy Libin, a former chief privacy officer at the Department of Justice, told *The Hill*, “The one question that has not been adequately answered is whether this program is effective. You don’t want to intrude on people’s privacy and undermine public trust if it’s not going to do any good.”

In other words, the Obama administration’s policy is that if you’re going to violate the constitutional rights

of the American public, you'd better make it count!

But recent leaks have also shown that the Obama administration is not alone in its violation of basic democratic rights.

Documents released by whistleblower Edward Snowden reveal that a British spy unit called the Joint Threat Research and Intelligence Group have been using sex to entice spy targets into what they call “honey traps.” Documents from presentations made by NSA officials at spy conferences explain that “honey traps” are used to “destroy, deny, degrade, and disrupt” targets by “discrediting” them.

The NBC News report, co-authored by Glenn Greenwald, explained that “most often, a male target is led to believe he has an opportunity for a romantic relationship or a sexual liaison with a woman, only to find that the woman is actually an intelligence operative.”

The report explains how British spies use Internet dating in order to entrap their targets. Documents show that the target is enticed “to go somewhere on the Internet, or a physical location” to be met by “a friendly face,” only to be discredited. Such a trap, documents claim, is “very successful when it works.”

The “honey trap” has been successfully used before, the report claims. For example, it was used to lure an Iranian scientist into meeting a woman, only to be kidnapped by the Israeli government.

The Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ) intelligence agency issued a statement in response to the recent revelations, which asserted that “all of GCHQ’s work is carried out in accordance with a strict legal and policy framework which ensures that our activities are authorized, necessary and proportionate, and that there is rigorous oversight...”

The especially degrading and malicious character of the GCHQ’s “honey trap” techniques underscores the antidemocratic character of the spying operations being orchestrated on both sides of the Atlantic.



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