

Snowden says NSA spying on civil rights organizations

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National Security Agency (NSA) whistle-blower Edward Snowden testified before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in Strasbourg this week via video link from Moscow, giving extended remarks on the subject of the US government's surveillance operations.

In his testimony, Snowden said the NSA has "specifically targeted the communications of either leaders or staff members in a number of purely civil or purely human rights organizations...including domestically, within the borders of the US." Snowden said that the NSA has been targeting "peaceful groups, unrelated to any terrorist threat," citing surveillance operations against the United Nations Children's Fund. The NSA engages in indiscriminate spying based on a "de facto policy of guilt by association," Snowden said.

Snowden's remarks come as yet another refutation of the US government's claims that the surveillance operations are directed exclusively against terrorist plotters. Instead, the spying apparatus targets billions of telephone and Internet users worldwide, with special attention going to critics of, and rivals to, US imperialism.

"Mass surveillance is used by the NSA for purposes of economic espionage," Snowden said, noting that the NSA has even been revealed as "spying on American lawyers negotiating trade deals."

While Snowden did not give a list of human rights groups that have been targeted, one can assume that major NGOs like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are among them. Insofar as they provide the public with genuine information about the crimes of US imperialism, they are obvious candidates for surveillance.

Snowden said the NSA uses the surveillance program XKeyscore to access communications metadata and

content "without any judicial approval or prior review." XKeyscore is being used, Snowden said, to target "entire populations" and "trillions" of communications to collect data on "religious beliefs, sexual or political affiliations, and transactions with certain businesses."

XKeyscore, the existence of which was publicized this past summer on the basis of documents leaked by Snowden, has been described in internal NSA documents as the agency's "widest-reaching" intelligence development program, covering "nearly everything a typical user does on the internet." XKeyscore makes this data, acquired from every nook and cranny of the web, available to analysts in real time.

The NSA shares the data acquired from these dragnet surveillance operations with European Union member states, Snowden said during testimony.

Snowden also referred to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, which signs legal authorizations on behalf of the surveillance agencies. Snowden described the FISA court as "the secret court in the United States that oversees mass surveillance programs...best described as a 'rubber-stamp court.'" He warned that the FISA court has been issuing judgments on "legal issues of global importance" away from any public oversight.

While noting that such a "nightmare scenario" has not yet arrived, Snowden said that nevertheless the necessary infrastructure was already in place for the NSA to coordinate the "rounding up" and internment in "camps" of specific groups targeted by the state.

Snowden offered testimony on a variety of other abuses being carried out by the state surveillance programs. He noted that the NSA collected "explicit sexual material regarding religious conservatives whose political views it disfavored and considered radical for

the purpose of exposing it to damage their reputations and discredit them within their communities...But no legal means currently exist to challenge such activities or to see penalties for such abuses.”

“The NSA has unlawfully compromised the world’s major transaction facilities,” Snowden said. “And in their reports they explicitly noted that such information provided ‘rich personal information’ including data that ‘is not about our targets.’”

Snowden also cited the use of “digital fingerprints” by the spy agencies, which enable analysts conducting surveillance “to instantly identify the movements and activities of you, your computers or other devices, your personal internet accounts or even key words of other uncommon strings that indicate an individual or group.”

Snowden’s revelations have exposed the blatant lies of the US political and intelligence establishment. Just last week, Director of National Intelligence James R. Clapper penned a letter to Senator Ron Wyden in which he acknowledged that the NSA reads Americans’ emails and other forms of communication without specific warrants. Clapper had previously issued a categorical denial of such activities during Congressional testimony in the summer of 2013, and President Barack Obama himself repeatedly denied that the US population was subject to dragnet surveillance.



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