

# Snowden documents show NSA spied on prominent Muslim-Americans

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Internal documents analyzed by Glenn Greenwald's the *Intercept* show that the US National Security Agency (NSA) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation surveilled email accounts held by a number of leading professionals and activists, all of a Muslim-American background.

The individuals cited by the *Intercept* were taken from a list of more than 7,000 email accounts spied on by the US government between 2002 and 2008. This list was transferred to Greenwald by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden. The names of the targeted individuals were pulled by Greenwald and his collaborators from a spreadsheet leaked by Snowden titled "FISA recap." Of the spied-upon email accounts, 202 belonged to US citizens, 1,782 to non-US citizens, and 5,501 were listed as unknown.

In a display of the backward and racist institutional culture prevailing inside the US security state, a US intelligence instructional document from 2005, published by the *Intercept*, used the fake name "Mohammed Raghead" on a sample form.

Faisal Gill, Asim Ghafoor, Hooshang Amirahmadi, Agha Saeed, and Nihad Awad, all figures with successful careers in and around the US political and activist establishments, were highlighted.

Gill was previously a Republican Party candidate and office holder, and served in the Department of Homeland Security under President George W. Bush.

Ghafoor is an attorney who has defended clients accused of terrorism by the US government. Speaking to the *Intercept*, Ghafoor noted that his Islamic background was likely a factor in making him a target. "There were over 40 lawyers from every blue-chip law firm in D.C. representing the Saudi government, Saudi princes—I'm not the only lawyer representing a foreign government," Ghafoor said.

Amirahmadi is a professor of international relations at Rutgers and a self-described atheist who opposes the confrontational policies toward Iran adopted by the US government.

Saeed, who holds a PhD from University of California Berkeley and the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, founded the American Muslim Alliance and has served as a coordinator for the California Civil Rights Alliance. Saeed made public efforts to oppose the reauthorization of the Patriot Act in 2006.

As Saeed noted in comments to the *Intercept*, the US government has a long history of carrying out surveillance for political purposes. "The government is always looking for a pretext to surveil people who are critical of policy. Now it has become common to accuse people of Islamist ties to do this; before, it was communism and leftists. The FBI has questioned me over both these things in my lifetime. In the 1980s they were suspicious of me over my opposition to arming Afghan Islamists; now they accuse me of being an Islamist," Saeed told the *Intercept*.

Awad is executive director at the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR).

FISA warrants supposedly require proof of probable cause that the proposed target is affiliated with a terrorist group or foreign power and is involved in spying, terrorism, or similar activities such as sabotage. In practice, the court approves the vast majority of warrant requests. The FISA court has rejected only 12 of the government's requests for surveillance authorization during the past 35 years, while approving more than 35,000. Even when the NSA does not possess an individual warrant from the FISA court, the agency uses a variety of other methods for warrantless data collection.

Defenders of the surveillance state claim that the low percentage of rejected requests only reflects the thoroughness of preparations made by the intelligence agencies before going in front of the court. But the names revealed by the *Intercept* show that even individuals with strong ties to establishment institutions and no conceivable connection to terrorism are being spied on.

The leaks demonstrate once again that the surveillance apparatus is a political instrument of the US ruling class, the purpose of which is to collect information on anyone even remotely associated with opposition to the police-state policies and war agenda of US imperialism.



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