

Report shows NSA tripled its domestic surveillance operations in 2017

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A US intelligence agency report released on Friday revealed that the National Security Agency (NSA) collected 534 million records of phone calls and text messages made by Americans last year, more than triple the amount gathered in 2016. The revelations come five years after the leaking of documents by whistleblower Edward Snowden, who first revealed the US government's mass electronic surveillance operations.

The sharp increase from 151 million recorded interactions from 2016 points to deep-seated anxiety amongst the American ruling class over historic and ever widening economic inequality, political instability, and growing social unrest. As the capitalist state slides deeper and deeper into crisis, it increasingly must resort to police state measures to maintain its rule. The growth in surveillance occurs within the context of the re-emergence of working class resistance to declining living standards.

In addition to spying on US citizens, the agency monitored record numbers of foreign individuals living outside the United States. The NSA targeted these individuals through a warrantless internet surveillance program, known as Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, renewed by Congress earlier this year. The number of targets increased from 106,469 in 2016 to its current level of 129,080. This number has risen from 89,139 since 2013, a 45 percent spike.

The NSA's illegal surveillance operations expanded rapidly after the still unexplained events of September 11, 2001 which were used to launch illegal wars against Afghanistan and Iraq. The agency first became the subject of controversy over illegal wiretapping in 2005 and again in 2013 when Snowden's revelations concerning mass electronic surveillance sparked major

public outcry.

The latest figures prove the fraudulent character of Obama's so-called "reform" of the NSA in 2015, which was presented to the public as a measure to curtail the agency's bulk telephone records spying program. The legal modifications by the Obama administration, drafted by and for the military-intelligence apparatus, actually served to *expand* the illegal and unconstitutional operations of the NSA.

As a parting gift to the current US President Donald Trump, in the last days of his administration Obama announced a further expansion of the spying power of American intelligence agencies. Under the new rules, the NSA was given the ability to share raw bulk data of private communications with 16 other intelligence agencies, including the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security. Edward Snowden responded to the news on Twitter with a warning: "As he hands the White House to Trump, Obama just unchained NSA from basic limits on passing raw intercepts to others."

The fact that the expansion of NSA spying was the direct result of policies pursued and implemented by Obama once again demonstrates just how close the Democratic Party has merged with the military-intelligence apparatus.

A three-part *World Socialist Web Site* investigative report published earlier this year, titled "The CIA Democrats," revealed the extraordinary number of former intelligence and military operatives from the CIA, Pentagon, National Security Council and State Department seeking nomination as Democratic candidates for Congress in the 2018 midterm elections. Regarding the right of the American government to unconstitutionally spy on the entire world's population there is broad bipartisan agreement between the Democrats and Republicans, both parties of big

business.

Under Bush, then Obama and now Trump, the NSA's domestic spying program has been ever more closely integrated into the US military. In 2009, President Obama oversaw the creation of the Pentagon's US Cyber Command, the US military's cyberwarfare unit, and its simultaneous integration with the NSA. Under this arrangement, the agencies began operating under joint leadership, a policy known as "dual-hatting."

On Friday, Army Gen. Paul Nakasone took over leadership of Cyber Command and the NSA. Nakasone's installment represents a new milestone in the drive toward war against Russia and China in every sphere, including online. At his confirmation hearing in March, Nakasone argued for a more aggressive stance in the realm of cyber warfare. "Our adversaries have not seen our response in sufficient detail to change their behavior," Nakasone told legislators. "They don't think much will happen."

At the same time Cyber Command has been elevated to an independent "unified command," putting it on par with the nine other US warfighting commands. The command also boasts a brand new \$500 million Integrated Cyber Center at its headquarters at Fort Meade in Maryland. This development constitutes "an acknowledgement that this new war fighting domain has come of age," in the words of Deputy Defense Secretary Patrick Shanahan.

The Trump administration, using the tools crafted and honed under Obama, now seeks to further weaponize government spying in the current drive to war. The appointment of Nakasone and the elevation of Cyber Command, however, also highlights the bitter struggle that has erupted within the American state between rival factions within the ruling class. In particular, the US intelligence agencies have cited the bogus claims of Russian "meddling" in the 2016 US presidential elections as the reasoning behind the recent decision to back Nakasone. The Trump administration has shown itself to be no less bellicose, accusing Russia of employing hackers to gain remote access to energy sector networks earlier this year.

The continued development of NSA surveillance and the US military's preparations for cyberwarfare again demonstrate the true purpose of the "War on Terror" as the pretext for the development of police state measures at home and an open confrontation against the rivals of

US imperialism abroad. As well as gathering intelligence on Russia and China, the NSA also spies on its supposed allies. The increase in spying operations on foreign nationals points to the growth of inter-imperialist disputes, in particular with Germany. According to a heat map of NSA surveillance operations leaked by Snowden in 2013, Germany is by far the most spied on country in Europe.



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