


The Morning Line

Your Daily Dispatch
From the NewsHour
Politics Team

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NSA Collects 'Word for Word' Every Domestic Communication, Says Former Analyst

SUMMARY

Judy Woodruff sits down with two former NSA officials who blew the whistle on what they said were abuses at the NSA, along with that agency's former inspector general, to talk about whether that secretive agency is recording all domestic calls in the U.S.

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Transcript

JUDY WOODRUFF: And we pick up on the continuing fallout from the revelations of former NSA contractor Edward Snowden. Last night, we debated the role of the Foreign Surveillance Intelligence court, which approves the government's requests to gather intelligence information on Americans.

Tonight, we have a conversation with three former NSA officials, a former inspector general and two NSA veterans who blew the whistle on what they say were abuses and mismanagement at the secret government intelligence agency.

William Binney worked at the NSA for over three decades as a mathematician, where he designed systems for collecting and analyzing large amounts of data. He retired in 2001. And Russell Tice had a two-decade career with the NSA where he focused on collection and analysis. He says he was fired in 2005 after calling on Congress to provide greater protection to whistle-blowers.

He claims the NSA tapped the phone of high-level government officials and the news media 10 years ago.

RUSSELL TICE, former National Security Agency analyst: The United States were, at that time, using satellites to spy on American citizens. At that time, it was news organizations, the State Department, including Colin Powell, and an awful lot of senior military people and industrial types.

JUDY WOODRUFF: So, this is the early 2000s.



Watch more of the interviews with the ex-NSA analysts and former inspector general.

RUSSELL TICE: This was in 2002-2003 time frame. The NSA were targeting individuals. In that case, they were judges like the Supreme Court. I held in my hand Judge Alito's targeting information for his phones and his staff and his family.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Bill Binney, what was your sense of who was being targeted and why they were being targeted? And what was being collected, in other words?

WILLIAM BINNEY, former National Security Agency technical leader: Well, I wasn't aware of specific targeting like Russ was. I just saw the inputs were including hundreds of millions of records of phone calls of U.S. citizens every day. So it was virtually -- there wasn't anybody who wasn't a part of this collection of information.

So, virtually, you could target anybody in this country you wanted.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Both Binney and Tice suspect that today, the NSA is doing more than just collecting metadata on calls made in the U.S. They both point to this CNN interview by former FBI counterterrorism agent Tim Clemente days after the Boston Marathon bombing. Clemente was asked if the government had a way to get the recordings of the calls between Tamerlan Tsarnaev and his wife.

TIM CLEMENTE, former FBI counterterrorism agent: On the national security side of the house, in the federal government, you know, we have assets. There are lots of assets at our disposal throughout the intelligence community and also not just domestically, but overseas. Those assets allow us to gain information, intelligence on things that we can't use ordinarily in a criminal investigation.

All digital communications are -- there's a way to look at digital communications in the past. And I can't go into detail of how that's done or what's done. But I can tell you that no digital communication is secure.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Tice says after he saw this interview on television, he called some former workmates at the NSA.

RUSSELL TICE: Well, two months ago, I contacted some colleagues at NSA. We had a little meeting, and the question came up, was NSA collecting everything now? Because we kind of figured that was the goal all along. And the answer came back. It was, yes, they are collecting everything, contents word for word, everything of every domestic communication in this country.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Both of you know what the government says is that we're collecting this -- we're collecting the number of phone calls that are made, the e-mails, but we're not listening to them.

WILLIAM BINNEY: Well, I don't believe that for a minute. OK?

I mean, that's why they had to build Bluffdale, that facility in Utah with that massive amount of storage that could store all these recordings and all the data being passed along the fiberoptic networks of the world. I mean, you could store 100 years of the world's communications here. That's for content storage. That's not for metadata.

Metadata if you were doing it and putting it into the systems we built, you could do it in a 12-by-20-foot room for the world. That's all the space you need. You don't need 100,000 square feet of space that they have at Bluffdale to do that. You need that kind of storage for content.

JUDY WOODRUFF: So, what does that say, Russell Tice, about what the government -- you're saying -- your understanding is of what the government does once these conversations take place, is it your understanding they're recorded and kept?

RUSSELL TICE: Yes, digitized and recorded and archived in a facility that is now online. And they're kind of fibbing about that as well, because Bluffdale is online right now.

And that's where the information is going. Now, as far as being able to have an analyst look at all that, that's impossible, of course. And I think, semantically, they're trying to say that their definition of collection is having literally a physical analyst look or listen, which would be disingenuous.

JUDY WOODRUFF: But the government vehemently denies it is recording all telephone calls. Robert Litt is the general counsel in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. He recently spoke at the Brookings Institution.

ROBERT LITT, NSA general counsel: We do not indiscriminately sweep up and store the contents of the communications of Americans or of the citizenry of any country. We do collect metadata, information about communications, more broadly than we collect the actual content of communications, but that's because it is less intrusive than collecting content and in fact can provide us information that helps us more narrowly focus our collection of content on appropriate foreign intelligence targets.

But it simply is not true that the United States government is listening to everything said by the citizens of any country.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Joel Brenner, who was the NSA's inspector general and then senior legal counsel, says the intelligence agency obeys the law and the directions of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance court.

JOEL BRENNER, former NSA inspector general: It's really important to understand that the NSA hasn't done anything, as I understand it and from all I know, that goes one inch beyond what it's been authorized to do by a court.

JUDY WOODRUFF: So, tell us, how extensive is the NSA's collection of data on American citizens, on their phone calls, on their e-mails, on their use of the Internet?

JOEL BRENNER: This the program only involves telephony metadata, not e-mails, not geographic location information.

The idea that NSA is keeping files on Americans, as a general rule, just isn't true. There's no basis for believing that. The idea that NSA is compiling dossiers on people the way J. Edgar Hoover did in the '40s and '50s or the way the East German police did, as some people allege, that's just not true.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Well, we have been talking to a couple of former NSA employees and one of the allegations they make is that it's not just collecting this metadata on telephone conversations; it's recording those conversations and it's storing them and keeping them for possible future use.

JOEL BRENNER: I think you're talking about Mr. Tice and Mr. Binney.

Mr. Binney hasn't been at the agency since 2001. Mr. Tice hasn't been at the agency since 2005. They don't know what's going on inside the agency.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Another allegation we heard from them, from Mr. Tice, is that back as of the time before he left the NSA in the early 2000s, that there was spying going on, on news organizations, on Supreme Court justices, on presidential candidates, then Senator Barack Obama, on military leaders, top generals in the army.

JOEL BRENNER: Mr. Tice made the allegations you have just indicated having to do with the period before 2005, eight years ago. They're just coming out now. I wonder why.

The farther he gets from the period when he could have known what he was talking about, the more fanciful his allegations have become.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Brenner claims that oversight of information gathering has actually improved.

JOEL BRENNER: We have turned intelligence into a regulated industry in a way that none of our allies, even in Europe, have done.

We have all three branches of government now involved in overseeing the activities of the NSA, the CIA, the DIA, and our other intelligence apparatus. This is an enormous achievement.

MAN: Government has gone too far in the name of security, that the Fourth Amendment has been bruised.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Last week, one oversight proposal in Congress aimed at preventing the NSA from collecting data on phone calls was narrowly defeated, but some members are vowing to press for additional restrictions on the investigative agency.



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William Stephenson Colorado • 5 hours ago
Popular Subject,,;this is egregious,,every politician who signed onto this program should be fired....period.....It goes beyond the 4th amendment...to CHILL whatever rights left we had the illussion we have...It was shameless oppurtunism to take advantage of the Hysteria after 911 , to subvert the constitution. History will be even more critical...It is also highly illegal as well as unethical.
7 ^ | v Reply Share >

GlovesOffMFers • 5 hours ago
"Your comment is awaiting moderation...see your comment."
Really, PBS? My, and you had me convinced y'all were the definition of progressive.
3 ^ | v Reply Share >

Devin Madden-Perdue → **GlovesOffMFers** • 3 hours ago
That would be standard practice as to avoid spammers. Unless you like seeing 1000 comments about how to make money online and the number one site for cheap Jordan's.
^ | v Reply Share >

Chaim DeLoye → **GlovesOffMFers** • 5 hours ago
Oops. Looks like somebody besides the NSA is reading your communications.
2 ^ | v Reply Share >

kend1 • 6 hours ago
I'm glad we have an honest government that would never use NSA info on Supreme court justices and their families to bribe and get court rulings in their favor and ensure their new law is found legal, because that would be wrong.
9 ^ | v Reply Share >

binarypipe → **kend1** • 5 hours ago
Question - What do you think happened to David Patraeus...?

Answer / Speculation - someone directed an asset to take him DOWN to further an agenda when he refused to play ball (he was implicated with the Stanley McChrystal drama) it was a vetting error and his plug was pulled albeit in a round about way.

Eric Holder knew of the affair months before news broke -
See also: <http://www.foxnews.com/politic...>
1 ^ | v Reply Share >

Chaim DeLoye → **binarypipe** • 4 hours ago
binarypipe - And I'm pretty sure Benedict Arnold wasn't a traitpor but was made to look like one after George Washington directed an asset to take him DOWN to further an agenda when he refused to play ball.
^ | v Reply Share >

binarypipe → **Chaim DeLoye** • 4 hours ago