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NSA Considered Ending Phone Spying Before the Edward Snowden Leaks



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A new report by the Associated Press suggests that the National Security Agency mulled the possibility of abandoning its phone surveillance program just before the Edward Snowden's leaks—though ultimately the suggestion didn't progress fast enough.

The report explains that some officials at the NSA "believed the costs outweighed the meager counterterrorism benefits" that the program offered. Those internal critics pointed to ever-increasing costs of recording and storing information from phone calls which weren't successfully uncovering evidence of terrorism. Understandably, they also "worried about public outrage if the program ever was revealed," points out the AP.

Indeed, a proposal to scrap the system was apparently circulating within the NSA among "top managers" during 2013—though it had yet to make it to the desk of the NSA director General Keith Alexander by the time that Snowden leaked its documents.

After the event, of course, the NSA strongly defended its practices over telephone surveillance, arguing that it was vital for routing out terrorist threats. This new report suggests that internal thinking may have been rather more conflicted.

Meanwhile, the NSA continues to collect and store phone call data under Section 215 of the Patriot Act. Presumably, plenty of people at the NSA still think it's a bad idea. [AP on Huffington Post]