



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 18, 2013

NSA Revelations Prove Abuse Is the Rule, Not the Exception

Recent [revelations](#) by the *Washington Post* have confirmed that NSA abuse of Americans' privacy through [unconstitutional](#) warrantless surveillance is far more prevalent than agency requests for information on terrorists. And it has also put to lie [President Obama's claims](#) that there has been no abuse of Americans' privacy by the NSA.

"The NSA [audit](#) obtained by *The Post*," the Washington, D.C. daily newspaper [revealed](#) August 15, "dated May 2012, counted 2,776 incidents in the preceding 12 months of unauthorized collection, storage, access to or distribution of legally protected communications." Each of those 2,776 incidents may contain up to several thousand privacy violations of Americans, meaning that millions of Americans' privacy rights may have been violated by the NSA with searches unauthorized by any judicial body. The *Post* [reported](#) of one of the 2,776 incidents that "the most serious incidents included a violation of a court order and unauthorized use of data about more than 3,000 Americans and green-card holders."

That last incident alone amounts to more than 10 times the quantity of all the phone records the NSA claims to have legitimately searched throughout 2012 in order to find information about alleged terrorists or their confederates. NSA Director General Keith B. Alexander claimed in June 18 testimony before the House Select Intelligence Committee of requests under Section 215 of the USA Patriot Act that "in this case, for 2012, less than 300 selectors were looked at, and they had an impact in helping us prevent potential terrorist attacks."

But the [NSA review document](#) did not review every violation of U.S. citizens' privacy. It only reviewed violations based from the NSA's Ft. Meade headquarters. The NSA also has large database systems and staff in half a dozen other locations, including a [huge new data center in Utah](#). The NSA document did not analyze abuse by non-NSA personnel either. Other agencies — as well as private contractors such as Edward Snowden — also have had access to NSA data center information. So the actual abuse could be much wider than the 2,776 incidents last year.

The 2012 NSA report puts to lie President Obama's remarks on the NSA in an August 9 press conference, where he [claimed](#):





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I've taken steps to make sure they have strong oversight by all three branches of government and clear safeguards to prevent abuse and protect the rights of the American people.... If you look at the reports — even the disclosures that Mr. Snowden has put forward — all the stories that have been written, what you're not reading about is the government actually abusing these programs and listening in on people's phone calls or inappropriately reading people's emails.

Even the NSA was forced to admit that Obama's remarks were wrong, [telling](#) the *Washington Post* for its August 15 story:

"We're a human-run agency operating in a complex environment with a number of different regulatory regimes, so at times we find ourselves on the wrong side of the line," a senior NSA official said in an interview, speaking with White House permission on the condition of anonymity.

The *Washington Post* [noted](#) that the NSA report revealed that instances of NSA improperly accessing Americans' private information — i.e., abuse — have increased over the years. The *Post* noted: "Despite the quadrupling of the NSA's oversight staff after a series of significant violations in 2009, the rate of infractions increased throughout 2011 and early 2012. An NSA spokesman declined to disclose whether the trend has continued since last year."

The *Washington Post* revelations have even the most militant warmongers wondering about the alleged benefits of the NSA keeping every American under surveillance. The *Washington Post* reported that "the interception of a 'large number' of calls placed from Washington when a programming error confused the U.S. area code 202 for 20, the international dialing code for Egypt, according to a 'quality assurance review that was not distributed to the NSA's oversight staff.'" That anecdote prompted even neoconservative security-state hawk Mark Steyn over at the *National Review* to [label](#) it "Idiot Big Brother," adding that "the prospect of NSA abuse is now a reality."

Through it all, the NSA has denied Freedom of Information requests by American citizens seeking to see the files the NSA has on them. Kevin Collier of DailyDot.com asked for his NSA file, and received a denial. Collier [blogged](#) about the NSA response:

"Although these two programs have been publicly acknowledged," the NSA wrote to me a few weeks later, "details about them remain classified and/or protected from release by statutes to prevent harm to the national security of the United States."

Other Americans have [reported](#) receiving the same kind of letter. Are bloggers like Kevin Collier and other Americans who have requested their NSA file really that much of a threat to national security that informing them about what information the government has on them will put everyone in danger? The NSA seems to act as if all American citizens are some kind of threat to national security on a par with actual terrorists.

The information on NSA abuse, the *Post* [reported](#), had been "provided earlier this summer to The Washington Post by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden."

Photo of NSA building at Fort Meade, Maryland: AP Images



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