



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on August 30, 2013

Surveillance Spending Vastly More Than Previously Thought

Thanks to the efforts of whistleblower Edward Snowden and [the reluctant cooperation of the Washington Post](#), American citizens are now able to see just what their half-trillion dollars have bought them over the last 10 years: a vastly larger and more expensive and invasive surveillance state than most people even imagined. And the *Post* warned that the “black budget” provided to them by Snowden is only part of the picture, and that even what was exposed is dated.



For simplicity, the “[black budget](#),” proposed to Congress and dated in February 2012 for the fiscal year 2013, funds the “black operations” of 16 spy agencies, not just the big ones capturing the headlines. The “big five” include the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Agency (NSA), the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) and the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO).

The budget, estimated at more than \$50 billion a year, fails to include another \$23 billion for similar surveillance costs absorbed by the Defense Department, according to the *Post*. And after reviewing Snowden’s documents with various spy agency advisors, part of Snowden’s leaks were “redacted” or eliminated from publication altogether. So the *Post*’s revelations provide a brief but limited and dated peek behind the black spy curtain that has shielded their operations for years. And because part of that budget is now funding measures to keep other whistleblowers from parting that curtain in the future, this may be the last time such a limited look will be allowed.

Nevertheless, what is revealed is staggering. The agencies, in aggregate, have four tasks and five missions. They collect data, analyze it, process it, and act on it. The starting point is with the little-known NRO, which designs, builds, and operates the spy satellites that collect satellite intelligence, divides it into bite-size pieces, and sends the signal intelligence (SIGINT) to the NSA, the imagery intelligence (IMINT) to the NSA, and the measurement and signature intelligence (MASINT) to the DIA.

From there, more than 100,000 workers analyze, track, and follow where that intelligence leads, in accordance with their mission: warning U.S. leaders about potential threats, neutralizing those threats, stopping the spread of weaponry in the possession of those threats, hacking into their networks, and eliminating the threats. The *Post* was more diplomatic about those five missions, but essentially the entire spy structure is designed to be the blunt instrument of foreign policy which implements strategies that ambassadors wearing white tie and tails aren’t able to.

The CIA, surprisingly, absorbs nearly \$15 billion of the “official” \$52.6 billion, an increase of 56 percent just since 2004 and twice what it spent in 2001. That dwarfs the \$10.8 billion flowing to the NSA, the \$10.3 billion funding the NRO, the \$4.9 billion that pays for the NGA, and the \$4.4 billion that funds the DIA.



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The 178-page report published by the *Post* was analyzed and produced several notable findings:

The funding for the CIA not only exceeds that of the NSA by a factor of two, it is much larger than most insiders had estimated.

The CIA and the NSA have launched aggressive new attacks into foreign intelligence networks, friends and foes alike, often to sabotage them or limit their capabilities. These include China, Russia, Cuba, North Korea, Iran, Iraq, and Israel.

The agencies, despite their huge budgets, have failed in their mission to know everything about everybody all the time. For instance, the report reveals that Pakistan is especially opaque, calling it an “intractable target” — espionage-ese for impossible to crack — and little is known about North Korea or its leaders’ intentions despite having all manner of high-tech tracking gear virtually surrounding that unhappy communist dictatorship.

The spy conglomerate currently has more than 4,000 internal investigations going on in order to limit another “Snowden event” from happening, calling it instead an “anomalous behavior” by personnel with access to highly classified information.

Steven Aftergood, an expert at the Federation of American Scientists, expressed his delight at the Snowden leak published by the *Post*, [noting its historic importance](#):

It was a titanic struggle just to get the top-line budget number disclosed, and that has only been done consistently since 2007. But a real grasp of the structure and operations of the intelligence bureaucracy has been totally beyond public reach [until now].

This kind of material, even on a historical basis, has simply not been available.

There was one other question that the report answered, at least in part: Where does all the money go? The *Post* explained:

The ... resources ... funded secret prisons, a controversial interrogation program, the deployment of lethal drones and a huge expansion of its counterterrorism center.

The CIA has devoted billions of dollars to recruiting and training a new generation of case officers ... \$2.3 billion for human intelligence operations and another \$2.5 billion to cover the cost of supporting ... those missions around the world.

[Part] was earmarked for creating and maintaining “cover” — the false identities employed by operatives overseas.

Part of the money is spent on blackmail and various paramilitary black operations:

A broad line item hints at the dimensions of the [CIA’s] expanded paramilitary role, providing more than \$2.6 billion for “covert action programs” that would include drone operations in Pakistan and Yemen, payments to militias in Afghanistan and Africa, and attempts to sabotage Iran’s nuclear program.

Gus Hunt, the CIA’s technical officer, [explained](#) that there is, at present, more data coming into the network than can be analyzed, so it is just being stored until technology and manpower can catch up:

The value of any piece of information is only known when you can connect it with something else that arrives at a future point in time. Since you can’t connect dots you don’t have, it drives us into a mode of ... we fundamentally try to collect everything and hang onto it forever.



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The brief glimpse behind the black spy curtain allowed by Snowden and the *Post*, while dated and limited, is nevertheless useful to Americans who have had their suspicions about just how invasive and powerful the surveillance state is in America. They have just had their worst suspicions confirmed.

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