



Written by [Dennis Behreandt](#) on January 24, 2009

NSA Analyst: All Americans Were Spied On

During that time, the Bush administration repeatedly assured Americans that only calls to and from foreign nations might be subject to monitoring in the effort to prevent terrorist attacks like 9/11.

Even though all communications from all Americans were potentially intercepted, in interviews Tice says that even though the Agency has the best computers, it's impossible to monitor every single American directly. Instead, he said they "look at the metadata, the signaling data for communications and ferret that information to determine what communications would ultimately be collected."



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In one of the operations he was involved in, he recalled, NSA "looked at organizations just supposedly so that we would not target them, so that we knew where they were as to not have a problem with them." Over time he said he grew to doubt that rationale as the justification for the program because it did not stop there and "collection on those organizations was 24/7 and 365 days a year, and it made no sense."

As a result of his disillusionment with what he witnessed at NSA, he began to investigate the extent to which Americans were being placed under surveillance. He also noted that he remained silent for the duration of the Bush administration, and only felt comfortable enough to come forward after that administration had left office.

According to Tice, among the people and organizations subject to ongoing surveillance were reporters and journalists and U.S. news organizations. He claims that the information collected on the news agencies, reporters, and journalists is "digitized and put into databases somewhere."

When asked the scope of the information collected on Americans by the NSA, he said "the parameters that were set for how to filter it ... were things like ... if a terrorist would normally only make a phone call for 1 or 2 minutes, then you look for communications that are only 1 or 2 minutes long. Now that could also be someone ordering a pizza, and asking their significant other what sort of toppings they wanted on their pizza."



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When asked how the NSA would handle questions asked by congressional committees, Tice claimed: "the NSA would tailor some of their briefings to try to be deceptive, for whether it be a congressional committee or someone they really didn't want to know exactly what was going on. There would be a lot of bells and whistles in a briefing and quite often the meat of the briefing was deceptive."

When asked in a second interview by MSNBC if the information collected stopped at phone and email info, Tice responded: "as far as the wiretap information that made it to NSA, there was also data mining involved. At some point information from credit card records and financial records was married in with that information."

As a result of the NSA program, uncounted thousands of Americans may have had their privacy compromised and are thus victims of an illegal spying regime. Says Tice: "the lucky U.S. citizens, tens of thousands of whom, that are now on digital databases at NSA that have no idea of this, also have that information included on those digital files that have been warehoused."

When asked who would use this information and what the reasons for obtaining it were, he responded: "the obvious explanation would be that if you did have a potential terrorist you would want to know where they're spending money, whether they purchase an airline ticket or something like that." He continues, "once again, we're talking about tens of thousands of innocent U.S. citizens, that have been caught up into this trap that they have no clue ... this thing could sit there for ten years and then potentially marries up with something else and then potentially ten years from now they get put on a no-fly list, and of course won't have a clue why."

The question is, are any of the people who might end up on that list terrorists or people with ties to terrorism? According to Tice, probably not. "In most cases," he said, "they don't have that at all, this is garnered from algorithms that have been put together to try to just dream up scenarios that might be information that is associated with how a terrorist could operate."

Another question Tice addressed was whether or not innocent American citizens might really wind up being listed by NSA as potential terrorists as a result of the eavesdropping program. In his first MSNBC interview, Tice pointed to the pizza scenario, but he also again emphasized that he was not merely engaging in idle speculation. According to the former analyst, "an innocent citizen could be easily tied into these things, and once that information gets into NSA and they start to put it into filters there ... if someone watched the daily news and mentioned something about the middle east, they could easily be brought to the forefront of having that little flag put by their name that says potential terrorist, and of course this U.S. citizen wouldn't have a clue."

Americans have always been secure in the papers and persons, protected from warrantless surveillance by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The Bush administration perilously watered down these crucial protections. In response to some questions asked about the NSA wiretapping in 2005, former President Bush nonetheless promised the American people that he would "do everything within the law, to protect them against another terrorist attack. As part of this effort I authorized the NSA to intercept the international communications of people with known links to Al-Qaeda, and related terrorist organizations." Most people, even if they were uncomfortable with the direction of the administration's programs, probably took it on face value that completely innocent citizens would not be subjected to unconstitutional surveillance.

In fact, Bush also said: "First, our intelligence activities strictly target Al-Qaeda and their known affiliates. Al-Qaeda is our enemy and we want to know their plans. Second, the government does not



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listen to domestic phone calls without court approval. Third, the intelligence activities I authorized are lawful and have been briefed to appropriate members of congress, both republican and democrat. Fourth, the privacy of ordinary Americans is fiercely protected in all our activities. We're not mining or trolling through the personal lives of millions of innocent Americans. Our efforts are focused on links to Al-Qaeda and their known affiliates."

If Tice's allegations are true, then these promises were lies.

When asked by MSNBC about the allegations, NSA's only comment was: "NSA considers the Constitutional rights of U.S. citizens to be sacrosanct. The intelligence community faces immense challenges in protecting our nation. No matter the challenges, NSA remains dedicated to performing its mission under the rule of law."



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