



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on August 14, 2014

Snowden Reveals Secret NSA “MonsterMind” Program

NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed a secret NSA program called “MonsterMind” in an [interview](#) with *Wired* magazine’s James Bamford August 12. The program is an automated prediction and response to possible cyber attacks against the United States, analyzing patterns of data flow into and out of the country, and automatically counter-attacking against the “wrong” type of patterns.



Snowden [told](#) Bamford from a Russian hotel room in exile that MonsterMind required the NSA to intercept all Americans’ private communications, raising privacy and constitutional issues. “If we’re analyzing all traffic flows,” Snowden said, “that means we have to be intercepting all traffic flows. That means violating the Fourth Amendment, seizing private communications without a warrant, without probable cause or even a suspicion of wrongdoing. For everyone, all the time.”

According to Yahoo News,

Beyond domestic privacy concerns, Snowden warns, the program could cause an international diplomacy nightmare for the U.S. as well, because the cyberattacks launched by MonsterMind are often routed through third-party computers housed in foreign countries.

The proactive nature of MonsterMind creates a sort of predictive judgment about a cyber attack that hasn’t even occurred, much like the Department of Precrime in the 2002 Tom Cruise movie [Minority Report](#). Bamford notes that “MonsterMind would automatically fire back, with no human involvement.”

And while MonsterMind has yet to malfunction, according to publicly available information, the NSA’s wiretapping efforts have produced [massive costs](#) globally already, including costs to U.S. businesses in the form of canceled contracts because of lack of trust. Snowden also reported that a wiretap of the Syrian Internet by the NSA went horribly wrong as their device “bricked,” accidentally shutting down the civil war-torn nation’s entire Internet system. When the system tanked, a fellow NSA analyst joked to Snowden that “If we get caught, we can always point the finger at Israel.”

Snowden has also revealed that the U.S. government sends raw data of private American citizens straight to Israeli intelligence. “Among the discoveries that most shocked him,” Bamford wrote, “was learning that the agency was regularly passing raw private communications — content as well as metadata — to Israeli intelligence.” The specter of sending digital U.S. phone calls and e-mail straight to a foreign government is troubling, but it adds “plausible deniability” to the claim by U.S. intelligence officials that the NSA isn’t listening to Americans’ phone calls. Why bother doing that when you can have a foreign intelligence agency do it on your behalf?

Snowden told Bamford that U.S. intelligence bureaucrats make little compromises to their integrity on a daily basis, so that “by the time you’ve been in 15 years, 20 years, 25 years, you’ve seen it all and it doesn’t shock you. And so you see it as normal. And that’s the problem — that’s what the [Director of National Intelligence James] Clapper event was all about. He saw deceiving the American people as what he does, as his job, as something completely ordinary. And he was right that he wouldn’t be



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punished for it, because he was revealed as having lied under oath and he didn't even get a slap on the wrist for it. It says a lot about the system and a lot about our leaders."

Bamford noted of Snowden's revelations,

Another troubling discovery was a document from NSA director Keith Alexander that showed the NSA was spying on the pornography-viewing habits of political radicals. The memo suggested that the agency could use these "personal vulnerabilities" to destroy the reputations of government critics who were not in fact accused of plotting terrorism.

Snowden was astonished by the memo revealing the threat to blackmail American citizens. "It's much like how the FBI tried to use Martin Luther King's infidelity to talk him into killing himself," Snowden told Bamford. "We said those kinds of things were inappropriate back in the '60s. Why are we doing that now? Why are we getting involved in this again?'"

Bamford played a minor role in the same hearings in the 1970s that put an end (temporarily) to the warrantless wiretapping of Americans by the FBI, CIA, and NSA, noting,

I confess to feeling some kinship with Snowden. Like him, I was assigned to a National Security Agency unit in Hawaii — in my case, as part of three years of active duty in the Navy during the Vietnam War. Then, as a reservist in law school, I blew the whistle on the NSA when I stumbled across a program that involved illegally eavesdropping on US citizens. I testified about the program in a closed hearing before the Church Committee, the congressional investigation that led to sweeping reforms of US intelligence abuses in the 1970s.... At several points I was threatened with prosecution under the Espionage Act, the same 1917 law under which Snowden is charged.

Bamford was never actually indicted, however, and went on to write several important books on U.S. intelligence overreach and its impact on the privacy of American citizens.

Not surprisingly, the mainstream media covering the *Wired* story chose to stress ephemera rather than the substance addressed in the interview. CNN elected to [highlight](#) whether Snowden had made a public relations "blunder" by embracing the American flag in a photo shoot for the *Wired* magazine cover story. The *New York Post* columnist Geoff Earle [expressed horror](#) that the "traitor" would choose to embrace the Stars and Stripes.

But the image of Snowden that emerges from the *Wired* interview appears to be much closer to Nathan Hale than to Philip Agee, the CIA turncoat who revealed names of CIA informants before defecting to Cuba. Although Snowden fled to Russia after leaving the United States, there's no publicly available information that he's worked at all with the successors of the old Soviet KGB. Snowden told Bamford, "Not only do I believe in something, I believe in it enough that I'm willing to set my own life on fire and burn it to the ground." Snowden clearly did burn his own life to the ground, giving up a cushy position with job security for the life of an exile. "I care more about the country than what happens to me," he continued. "But we can't allow the law to become a political weapon or agree to scare people away from standing up for their rights, no matter how good the deal. I'm not going to be part of that."

Bamford noted that Snowden considered becoming a whistleblower back during the Bush administration, but held off until after the 2008 elections. He had hoped that Obama would bring the change to the surveillance programs he promised during his campaign. "I think even Obama's critics were impressed and optimistic about the values that he represented," he told *Wired*. "He said that we're not going to sacrifice our rights. We're not going to change who we are just to catch some small percentage more terrorists."



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But that never happened. Instead, Snowden noted, “Not only did they not fulfill those promises, but they entirely repudiated them.”

Snowden ended up donating \$500 to Ron Paul’s presidential campaign in 2012, and became a whistleblower after Obama was reelected and his Director of National Intelligence James Clapper blatantly lied to the U.S. Senate about surveillance of the American people.



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