



Who Are the NSA's Corporate Partners?

Every day, there is new information on the shrinking of the scope of liberty and personal privacy.

Thursday, for example, the *New York Times* reported:

The National Security Agency is winning its long-running secret war on encryption, using supercomputers, technical trickery, court orders and behind-the-scenes persuasion to undermine the major tools protecting the privacy of everyday communications in the Internet age, according to newly disclosed documents.



In court documents filed by Google and [obtained by Consumer Watchdog](#), the tech giant argued “a person has no legitimate expectation of privacy in information he voluntarily turns over to third parties.” Basically, Google claims the right to read the e-mail of all its customers in order to push ads to them based on key words in the communications.

Earlier, [The New American reported on the participation of Facebook](#) with government inquiries into users' private data stored by the social-media company.

In light of the collusion of corporate, technological, and government interests it is important to rehearse the list of those companies whose cooperation in the various NSA snooping programs is facilitating the construction of the surveillance state.

First, there is PRISM. Under PRISM, the NSA and the FBI are “tapping directly into the central servers of nine leading U.S. Internet companies, extracting audio, video, photographs, e-mails, documents and connection logs that enable analysts to track a person's movements and contacts over time,” as reported by the *Washington Post*.

The joint venture has been functioning since 2007, but only came to light in a PowerPoint presentation that was part of the cache of documents leaked by Snowden.

Snowden claimed that the program was so invasive that “They [the NSA and the FBI] quite literally can watch your ideas form as you type.”

According to Snowden, the following Internet outfits give the NSA access to their servers, and thus their users' information:

- Microsoft
- Apple
- Google
- Facebook
- PalTalk



AOL

Microsoft and Google have sued the federal government to get permission to publicly reveal the surveillance requests they have received from the various federal agencies.

On the telecommunication side, both AT&T and Verizon have apparently granted the government unconstitutional access to the phone records of millions of customers.

Most recently, [a story published in the *New York Times* revealed](#) that “For at least six years, law enforcement officials working on a counternarcotics program have had routine access, using subpoenas, to an enormous AT&T database that contains the records of decades of Americans’ phone calls.”

Included in the Snowden disclosures was a similar set-up involving Verizon customers’ call logs and the NSA.

A key to understanding how and why the NSA (and other intelligence and law enforcement agencies) can so quickly and consistently tap into the Internet and the telecom infrastructure is the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act (CALEA) of 1994.

Under provisions of CALEA, domestic telecommunication companies are required to provide government and law enforcement with access to their data and telecom traffic. This includes the mandate that all vendors who provide equipment to those companies likewise leave their products vulnerable to government taps.

One of the companies most often named in connection with CALEA is Cisco, the nation’s leading service provider of routers and switches.

Then, on August 27, [the *Wall Street Journal* reported](#) that CALEA’s reach extended even to foreign telecommunication companies merging with or acquiring the assets of U.S.-based companies. Before being given the green light, these companies have had to commit to the federal government to adhere to the terms of CALEA and give unfettered access to their equipment whenever a demand was made.

International firms named in the *Wall Street Journal* article include Alcatel-Lucent, Nokia, and Ericsson, each of which has merged with or purchased American entities.

Despite a few well-intentioned, but ultimately impotent efforts by lawmakers to slow the sprawl of the surveillance apparatus, inertia seems to be carrying the NSA and others farther along the trajectory of tyranny. And every year Congress writes big checks, keeping the data collection programs in the black — literally and figuratively.

In August, [a story in the *Washington Post*](#) shone a little light on the secret surveillance budget.

According to information in that story, the “black budget” for intelligence activities for Fiscal Year 2013 was \$52.6 billion. This covered the operating funds for “16 spy agencies” and their more than 107,000 employees.

As the borders of liberty are pushed by back by the federal government, there yet remains time for the people and the states to push back.

First, people must hold accountable every elected official who votes to fund these agencies and their unconstitutional searches and seizures of private information. Second, state legislators must refuse to act as mere administrative functionaries of the federal government.



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on September 6, 2013

Finally, rather than experience annual growth, companies suspected of giving the government access to customer files and data should be held accountable by those users.

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