

NSA spy program amounts to illegal search and seizure: Analyst

Interview with Edward Corrigan

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Press TV has conducted an interview with Edward Corrigan, international lawyer from Ontario, about the controversy caused by Washington's espionage plans for its citizens and the unregulated secret surveillance system known as X-Keyscore of the NSA. The following is an approximate transcript of the interview.

Press TV: I'd like to get your reaction to this, at this point it seems that privacy is a long far-fetched dream.

Corrigan: It's George Orwell's '1984' in spades.

The United States Constitution clearly prohibits illegal search and seizure and I would argue that this is clearly an illegal search and seizure under the US Constitution and it is not justified under any sort of national security provision.

The amount of terrorism that we're talking about is really infinitesimal - tiny. But they're just vacuum-cleaning all the information out. And this is about commercial dealings, intimate conversations between parties, business relations; information that would relate to insider trading on the stock market; possibility of getting access to information that is personal and private and could be used to extort information from people to force people to do things - to blackmail.

So this is a clear breach of the American Constitution with regard to American citizens and I don't think any sort of sophistry or legal arguments are going to justify that which clearly is an illegal search and seizure. There is a big history where you need a warrant to go into somebody's computer so this is the same thing. It really is frightening in its implications.

And you have actually low level security analysts with access to this information - we're talking about hundreds of thousands of people and to say that there is no potential for abuse I think is beyond absurd.

Actually, Snowden himself was a low-level analyst and he apparently had access to virtually anything that he wanted to. And to say that somebody who would infiltrate the NSA would not use that information for illegal purposes or unjust enrichment, this is simply not going to happen.

So, it's a massive invasion of personal privacy and clearly illegal for the Americans, but it's also for around the world, Canadians, people from Britain.

Anybody who is working on the internet or telephone or emails, everybody is subject to this search, which I think is an egregious violation of privacy, but technically is illegal under American law because the American Constitution protects Americans, but doesn't protect Canadians and people in the Middle East or Europe or elsewhere.

But this certainly has potential for abuse. And in Germany there's been quite a hostile reaction to this because they of course have memory of the Stasi, which is East German secret police and of course the Gestapo and this brings back the worst darkest images we have of Stalinist Russia where there was massive intrusion of the state in surveillance.

The potential for abuse is staggering.

Press TV: Are we in a sense past the point of no return when it comes to privacy?

Corrigan: There was an attempt at the US Congress - and it narrowly failed - to prohibit the NSA from going into information unless there was specific reason to target an individual. It was to put limits on this unlimited amount of surveillance and spying on people and it was to try to restrict it. And this was a bi-partisan effort by Republicans and Democrats, but it did fail.

It's strange that Obama is being support by Barbara Bachman and other people, which normally would not have any sort of say in the matter.

But I think there is a practical application here, too. If you're taking trillions of pieces of information, how do you analyze that; how do you review it - unless you've got specific information for people? You know, you have intimate conversations, but what business does the United States have on spying on people who are doing a wheat deal or something for manufacturing or transmitting documents, which maybe have patent implications or legal.

This stuff is supposed to be protected yet the NSA seems to have a blank check to be able to get all this information. Where are the safeguards? We haven't seen safeguards. The courts are involved, but it's all behind doors.

This goes back to the star chamber where people convicted, tried and executed all behind closed doors where nobody had a right to know even the offenses were they were facing and certainly no right to a self defense.

The NSA now has become a monster. I think the potential for abuse is really quite staggering and I would hope there is a very strong pushback from the Europeans and other countries. No country should have the right to do that.

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