

Cell phone records report triggers US outrage

WASHINGTON, US: Civil liberty groups and privacy campaigners reacted with outrage on Thursday, 6 June 2013, to a report that the US intelligence community, under President Barack Obama, is pursuing the wide-scale monitoring of millions of Americans' cell phone records.



(Image source: [Wikipedia](#))

"It's a program in which some untold number of innocent people have been put under the constant surveillance of government agents," said Jameel Jaffer, deputy legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

"It is beyond Orwellian, and it provides further evidence of the extent to which basic democratic rights are being surrendered in secret to the demands of unaccountable intelligence agencies."

"Privacy must be a priority"

Former vice president Al Gore, on his Twitter feed, agreed: "In (this) digital era, privacy must be a priority. Is it just me, or is secret blanket surveillance obscenely outrageous?"

The Guardian newspaper in London reported Thursday that Verizon, one of the major US mobile phone operators, is under a top-secret court order to give the National Security Agency details on all telephone calls, both domestic and international, made on its networks.

Reproducing the court order on its website, the Guardian said it shows for the first time that under Obama's administration, the phone records of millions of Americans are being indiscriminately collected by the National Security Agency (NSA) "regardless of whether they are suspected of any wrongdoing."

The White House did not explicitly confirm the report, but a senior official acknowledged Thursday that collecting phone

records was a critical part of the ongoing US war on terrorism.

"Untargeted, wholly domestic surveillance"

The San Francisco-based Electronic Frontier Foundation, a non-profit digital rights group, alleged that such "untargeted, wholly domestic surveillance" has been going on for at least seven years, when George W. Bush was president.

"It is very likely that business records orders like this exist for every major American telecommunication company -- meaning that, if you make calls in the United States, the NSA has those records," it said.

There was no immediate reaction from Verizon, which alongside AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile, is among the biggest mobile phone operators in the United States, where 87% of adults have a cellphone.

"Now that this unconstitutional surveillance effort has been revealed, the government should end it and disclose its full scope," said Michelle Richardson of the ACLU's legislative office in Washington. "Congress should likewise open a full investigation," she added.

Facts, law classified and concealed

"Since 9/11, the government has increasingly classified and concealed not just facts, but the law itself. Such extreme secrecy is inconsistent with our democratic values of open government and accountability," Richardson said.

The EFF said: "This revelation should end, once and for all, the government's long-discredited secrecy claims about its dragnet domestic surveillance programs."

"We're angry... It's time to start the national dialogue about our rights in the digital age. And it's time to end the NSA's unconstitutional domestic surveillance program."

On Twitter, some users -- including rapper Busta Rhymes, called the revelations "crazy" while others reacted with a humorous blend of irony and sarcasm.

"Just got a weird text from the #NSA reminding me to call my mother every Sunday," quipped @HeyRatty. "Is the #NSA paying part of my 'Share' plan?" echoed @Rhondako.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>