

FISA court reinstates bulk surveillance of US communications

By Thomas Gaist
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A federal judge on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) ruled Monday that the US National Security Agency may continue its dragnet surveillance of US telecommunications records for a period of six months.

The decision temporarily suspends the new restrictions on the NSA's bulk telephone data surveillance passed by Congress as part of the USA Freedom Act on June 2. The act specifically authorizes bulk collection of phone records, while transferring control of these records to telecommunication companies. It also provided the NSA with a six-month period in which the new mechanisms could be phased in.

The ruling from judge Michael Mosman, which was requested by the Obama administration, is a continuation of the methods of the FISA court, which operates as a law unto itself, overruling prohibitions on arbitrary searches upheld by both US and international statutes and asserting sweeping powers to brush aside the decisions of civilian courts.

In May, the Second Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that the bulk phone records program is illegal, and that the Patriot Act did not give the NSA the powers that it claimed.

"Second Circuit rulings are not binding on the FISC," Monday's opinion stated, "and this Court respectfully disagrees with that court's analysis, especially in view of the intervening enactment of the USA Freedom Act." With the USA Freedom Act, the court noted, Congress had explicitly authorized the extension of the bulk surveillance for six months.

In addition to the impact of the USA Freedom Act, "the fact that international terrorist operatives are using telephone communications," Mosman ruled, is sufficient to render the mass surveillance of US

communications legal under the sweeping powers granted to the executive branch by section 501 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.

"It is necessary for the government to acquire all of the records in order to identify those specific records that contain information about the targets," the opinion stated.

The court's ruling, together with the USA Freedom Act itself, ensures that the NSA will continue to have all the powers it has demanded to monitor the phone records of the entire population. It will control the records itself for a period of six months, and then will be able to request records from the telecommunications companies.

The bulk telephone records program is itself only a small component of the vast illegal and unconstitutional spying apparatus.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has maintained throughout the months-long theatrics associated with the USA Freedom Act, "surveillance reform" is in reality nothing more than a propaganda campaign aiming to legitimize and whitewash illegal spying.

Far from reigning in these operations, the US government is constantly expanding and developing its electronic surveillance capabilities, as part of preparations for mass repression at home and war abroad. The US military-intelligence apparatus seeks nothing less than "total information dominance," through ever-expanding electronic surveillance, hacking and cyberwarfare operations against governments, institutions, and civilian populations all around the world.

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