

NSA Sharing Data on Americans with Israel

September 13, 2013 - It seems like every day there is a new revelation about the NSA and its domestic spying activities. But the latest disclosure significantly widens the scope of the agency's intrusion into the everyday lives of average, law abiding Americans. The Guardian newspaper has posted a document that was leaked by Edward Snowden which reveals a secret agreement between Israel and the United States. The deal, which was signed in 2009 by the Obama administration, details a relationship between the NSA and Israeli Signals Intelligence National Unit (INSU) under the terms of which the NSA is passing complete sets of raw data from the United States to Israel without doing anything to hide the personal information of Americans.

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The data being provided to Israel includes information obtained by the NSA under the supervision of the federal FISA Court. When the NSA passes this data along to other US agencies, it is required by law to scrub it for personal information first. But under the terms of the agreement, that process does not take place prior to passing information to the Israelis.

The wording in the agreement actually says that data passed to Israel, "includes, but is not limited to, unevaluated and unminimized transcripts, facsimiles, telex, voice and Digital Network Intelligence metadata and content." "Unminimized" is the term the agency uses for scrubbing the data it collects prior to dissemination.

The agreement is not a treaty. Language included in the document states that it is not legally enforceable and that it is not to be considered an international agreement. Given this, it is hard to see how handing this type of data over to a foreign government would legal for any US agency. Furthermore, it is not clear that there aren't other similar agreements with additional foreign governments.

The revelation is disturbing. The more personally identifiable information that is collected and shared, the more damage is done to Americans' privacy rights on a daily basis. American citizens should not have to worry about their government sharing the details of their private lives with other governments.

by Jim Malmberg

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