

NSA: THE “HALF-BACON AGENCY”

My mom's in town, so I'll be doing light posting over the next several days.

But I did want to emphasize the rather startling news that came out of yesterday's House Judiciary Committee on the NSA spying programs.

NSA Director John Inglis revealed that the FISA Court permits the government to do three jumps from an initial number tied to a phone number reasonably believed to be tied to terrorism (or relevant to Iran, though that search criteria didn't get mentioned at all in the parts of the hearing I watched).

Three degrees of separation!

Remember, some years ago, every single person in the US could be connected via six degrees – the old Kevin Bacon game. There's some evidence that that number has become smaller – perhaps as small as 3 (I've seen more scientific numbers that say it is 4.5 or thereabouts).

In any case, if the US is using the excuse of terror to get three jumps deep into US person associations, then this program is even more intrusive than they've let on.

One thing I didn't see disclosed yesterday? To what extent the government claims these 3- (or 2, which – IIRC – Deputy Attorney General James Cole said was their most productive layer) degrees of separation from someone claimed in an articulation not closely reviewed has ties to terrorism. Is talking to someone who talks to someone who talks to someone who is a terrorist used, in secret, to claim people are agents of a foreign power?

In any case, this means the NSA has been spending its time playing 3 degrees of separation from Kevin Bacon in secret.