# "FOLKSY AND FIRM" FLUMMOXES FANCY NYT JOURNALISTS

Less than 10 days ago, Keith Alexander admitted to Patrick Leahy that the single solitary case in which the phone dragnet proved critical was that of Basaaly Moalin. But that was not an attack. Rather, it was an effort to send money to al-Shabaab (and others) because they were protecting Somalia against a US backed Ethiopian invasion.

And yet two crack "journalists" used this as the lead of their "interview" with Alexander with not a hint of pushback.

> The director of the National Security Agency, Gen. Keith B. Alexander, said in an interview that to prevent terrorist attacks he saw no effective alternative to the N.S.A.'s bulk collection of telephone and other electronic metadata from Americans.

The phone dragnet has never — never! — been more than one tool in preventing any attack, and yet Alexander gets to imply, unchallenged, it is critical going forward.

Instead of actual reporting, we get platitudes like this.

> General Alexander was by turns folksy and firm in the interview. But he was unapologetic about the agency's strict culture of secrecy and unabashed in describing its importance to defending the nation.
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> That culture is embodied by two installations that greet visitors to Fort Meade. One is a wall to honor N.S.A. personnel killed on overseas missions. The other is a tribute to the Enigma program, the code-breaking

> success that helped speed the end of
> World War II and led to the creation of
> the N.S.A. The intelligence community
> kept Enigma secret for three decades.

The only thing remotely resembling a challenge
came when these "reporters" note Alexander's
claim to have willingly shut down the Internet
metadata program (which the NSA has largely kept
secret, in spite of having been disclosed)
ignores NSA claims it (like the phone dragnet
now, purportedly) was critical.

> But he said the agency had not told its
> story well. As an example, he said, the
> agency itself killed a program in 2011
> that collected the metadata of about 1
> percent of all of the e-mails sent in
> the United States. "We terminated it,"
> he said. "It was not operationally
> relevant to what we needed."
>
> However, until it was killed, the N.S.A.
> had repeatedly defended that program as
> vital in reports to Congress.

The rest consists of more of the same kind of
rebuttal by redefinition. The claim that NSA
shares data with Israel is wrong, this
"journalism" says, because "the probability of
American content in the shared data was
extremely small" (which of course says nothing
about the way it would violate minimization
procedures in any case). The claim that NSA
launched 200 offensive cyberattacks in 2011 is
wrong because many of those were actually other
"electronic missions." Besides, Alexander
claims,

> "I see no reason to use offensive tools
> unless you're defending the country or
> in a **state of war**, or you want to
> achieve some really important thing for
> the good of the nation and others," he
> said. [my link, for shits and giggles]

We are not now nor were we in 2006 when StuxNet started "in a state of war" with Iran, so how credible are any of these claims?

Mostly though, this appears to be an attempt, four months after highlighting the importance of PRISM against cyberattacks but then going utterly silent about that function, to reassert the importance of NSA's hacking to prevent hacking.

Even there, though, Alexander presented dubious claims that got no challenge.

> General Alexander said that confronting what he called the two biggest threats facing the United States — terrorism and cyberattacks — would require the application of expanded computer monitoring. In both cases, he said, he was open to much of that work being done by private industry, which he said could be more efficient than government.
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> In fact, he said, a direct government role in filtering Internet traffic into the United States, in an effort to stop destructive attacks on Wall Street, American banks and the theft of intellectual property, would be inefficient and ineffective.
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> "I think it leads people to the wrong conclusion, that we're reading their e-mails and trying to listen to their phone calls," he said.

The NSA **already is** filtering Internet traffic into the United States (and also searching on and reading incidentally collected Internet traffic without a warrant) under Section 702 certificates supporting counterterrorism, counterproliferation and … cyberattacks.

But nosiree, Alexander can't envision doing what he's already doing — and had been doing in a way that violated statute and the Fourth Amendment for three years already by 2011 — in the name of

protecting the banksters who've gutted our economy. Only all of that — including the retention of US person data in the name of protecting property (presumably including intellectual property) is baked right into the NSA's minimization procedures.

And that bit about violating Section 702 and the Fourth Amendment **for over three years** with a practice that was also baked into NSA's minimization procedures? Here's the claim the NYT's crack journalists allow Alexander to end this charade with.

> "We followed the law, we follow our policies, we self-report, we identify problems, we fix them," he said. "And I think we do a great job, and we do, I think, more to protect people's civil liberties and privacy than they'll ever know."