

DROWNING IN HAYSTACKS

The NYT and Guardian have similar stories out today describing the sheer breadth of NSA's spying. The Guardian describes how NSA gleefully embraced change because it presented more opportunities for SIGINT collection.

In one of the leaked 'State of the Enterprise' documents from 2007, an NSA staff member says: "The constant change in the world provides fertile ground for discovering new targets, technologies and networks that enable production of Sigint."

The official happily embraces this: "It's becoming a cliché that a permanent state of change is the new standard. It is the world we live in – navigating through continuous whitewater."

It's an environment in which the NSA thrives, the official says. And adds: "Lucky for us."

And both present the plight of someone analyzing Lashkar-e-Taiba who couldn't read the intelligence because it was all Farsi and Arabic.

One N.S.A. officer on the Lashkar-e-Taiba beat let slip that some of his eavesdropping turned out to be largely pointless, perhaps because of the agency's chronic shortage of skilled linguists. He "ran some queries" to read intercepted communications of certain Lashkar-e-Taiba members, he wrote in the wiki, but added: "Most of it is in Arabic or Farsi, so I can't make much of it."

Both, too, present how detailed our intelligence from Afghanistan has been – though the NYT

noted, it doesn't seem to have brought us success.

We are collecting enormous amounts of data, but it's not clear what good it's doing us.

Meanwhile, remember this. The intelligence community keeps missing Congress' mandated deadlines to install insider detection software – including in the Hawaii location from which Snowden took his files. Given Snowden's success, it's safe to assume paid assets of foreign governments have gotten some of it as well. The reason we're not protecting all this intelligence is because we don't have the bandwidth to run the software.

Collecting all this data – particularly if we can't even analyze much of it – has costs. One cost is in the tradeoff we've made in keeping it secure.

Our haystacks are drowning us.