

THE MISPLACED ENTHUSIASM FOR OBAMA'S 2-HOP "CHANGE"

I'm seeing a lot of enthusiasm about President Obama's promise to limit the NSA to 2 hops on its phone dragnet.

Effective immediately, we will only pursue phone calls that are two steps removed from a number associated with a terrorist organization instead of three.

But it's not that big of a limit.

As far back as 2011, the NSA had standardized on 2-hops, only permitting a 3rd with special approval. (See page 13.)

While the BR Order permits contact chaining for up to three hops, NSA has decided to limit contact chaining to only two hops away from the RAS-approved identifier without prior approval from your Division management to chain the third hop.

So in effect, Obama has replaced the NSA's internal directive limiting the hops to 2 with his own directive (which can be pixie dusted with no notice) limiting the hops to 2.

Also, can anyone explain what the word "pursue" means in Obama's promise?

The concerns about the dragnet arise, in large part, from other things: the audit-free access of the data integrity analysts, the opacity of whether they do what they claim they do (which has as much impact on the extent of the spying as the number of hops), and what they do with it afterwards. Not to mention the sheer hubris of even creating that database of every American's

phone-based relationships.

Don't get me wrong: given a choice, I'd take 2-hops over 3 (or 4, as could be kluged until 2009).

But it is largely a continuation of the dragnet in its current form, not any end to the dragnet itself.