

WILL KEITH ALEXANDER FINALLY TELL THE FULL TRUTH ABOUT THE SECTION 215 DRAGNET IN TODAY'S SECRET EMERGENCY HEARING?

Since Edward Snowden made it clear the government has been collecting every American's phone records in the name of terrorism (and Iran), the National Security establishment has made a great show of transparency.

Don't worry it's "just" metadata, they said. Only 300 queries, well, we really mean only 300 identifiers to query on, which works out to be more than 300 queries. Only those who talk to terrorists. Or talk to those who talk to terrorists. Or talk to those who talk to those who talk to those who talk to terrorists, they ultimately revealed.

But last Thursday, the government admitted, sort of, that they're not being as transparent as they claim. In a letter submitted in an effort to stall for time in ACLU's suit to stop the 215 collection, the government offered a 400+ word description of the program. But the description started by claiming the program is, "in many respects, still classified."

This case concerns a highly sensitive and, in many respects, still classified intelligence-collection program that is designed to assist the U.S. Government in discovering whether known or suspected terrorists have been in contact with other persons who may be engaged in terrorist activities, including persons and activities inside the United States. Under this program, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) obtains authorization from the

Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (“FISA Court”) to collect telephony metadata from certain telecommunications service providers. The National Security Agency (NSA), in turn, archives this information; queries the data, when strict standards are met, to detect communications between foreign terrorist organizations and their potential operatives located in the United States; and provides leads to the FBI or others in the Intelligence Community for counterterrorism purposes. [my emphasis]

So what do the “many respects” of this program that remain classified do? And do those “many respects” describe why the government needs to create an associational database including every American to help in just 13 plots over 7 years?

Which is why I find it interesting that, as soon as it became clear the Amash-Conyers amendment to the Defense Appropriations – which would defund the dragnet collection – would get a vote, NSA Director Keith Alexander decided he needed to talk to Congress in secret.

NSA head General Keith Alexander scheduled a last-minute, members-only briefing in response to the amendment, according to an invitation distributed to members of Congress this morning and forwarded to HuffPost. “In advance of anticipated action on amendments to the DoD Appropriations bill, Ranking Member C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger of the House Intelligence Committee invites your Member to attend a question and answer session with General Keith B. Alexander of the National Security Agency,” reads the invitation.

“The briefing will be held at the Top Secret/SCI level and will be strictly Members-Only,” the invitation read.

So it seems that Alexander has more to say about this program he has feigned transparency on for the last month and a half.

That said, Alexander has a serial history of misleading statements when he doesn't have a public fact-checker. So while he may tell Congressmen and -women more details about how they're really using this dragnet database and why making 13 investigations easier merits such overkill, it's unlikely he'll tell the complete truth. I'm not optimistic.

But he may finally reveal why the government chose this overkill method of surveillance.

While Alexander is conducting this top secret briefing, you can do your own lobbying[: call you member of Congress and tell them to support Amash-Conyers.