

ON THE 12TH DAY OF CHRISTMAS, THE NSA GAVE TO ME ... 12 “TERRORISM SUPPORTERS”

Dianne Feinstein is writing op-eds again. Of course, I'm not actually recommending you read her defense of the phone dragnet program – though I do recommend this rebuttal of her claims from ACLU's Mike German.

In other words, the problem was not that the government lacked the right tools to do its job (it had ample authority to trace Mihdhar's calls). The problem was that the government apparently failed to use them.

But I do want to look at how DiFi dances around the debunked claims about all the plots the dragnet have stopped.

Since its inception, this program has played a role in stopping roughly a dozen terror plots and identifying terrorism supporters in the U.S.

Her claim is grammatically false, of course. Of the 2 known of these 12 cases where Section 215 was useful, with just one – when it was used to identify an unknown phone of one already identified accomplice of Najibullah Zazi – was a plot actually stopped. In the other, all Section 215 did was identify a supporter of terrorism, Basaaly Moalin. And even there, the FBI itself believed Moalin sent money to al-Shabaab not so much to support terrorism, but to support expelling (US backed) Ethiopian invaders of Somalia.

So while she could say that on 12 occasions Section 215 has helped stop a plot or identified

terrorism supporters, what she has said is – surprise surprise! – a lie.

But I am rather amused at how close DiFi gets to arguing a dragnet of every Americans' phone based relationships is worthwhile because it has found 12 guys who support, but do not engage in, terrorism.