

THOMAS DRAKE COMPLAINED ABOUT MICHAEL HAYDEN SPENDING \$1B TO DO WHAT \$3M COULD DO

Thomas Drake, the NSA whistleblower, was on 60 Minutes this evening. I'll have more to say about his appearance and case going forward, but I just wanted to highlight a critical detail revealed by 60 Minutes: the relative cost of Trailblazer—the SAIC implemented program Michael Hayden championed—and ThinThread—the program Drake and others claim was more effective and had privacy protections.

One of them was Lieutenant General Michael Hayden, the head of the agency: he wanted to transform the agency and launched a massive modernization program, code named: "Trailblazer." It was supposed to do what Thin Thread did, and more.

Trailblazer would be the NSA's biggest project. Hayden's philosophy was to let private industry do the job. Enormous deals were signed with defense contractors. [Bill] Binney's Thin Thread program cost \$3 million; Trailblazer would run more than \$1 billion and take years to develop.

"Do you have any idea why General Hayden decided to go with Trailblazer as opposed to Thin Thread, which already existed?" Pelley asked.

"I believe he was convinced by others that going with a large-scale, industrial strength solution was the approach that NSA needed to take. You can't really understand why they would

make that kind of a decision without understanding the culture of NSA,” Drake said.

Asked to elaborate, Drake said, “Careers are built on projects and programs. The bigger, the better their career.” [my emphasis]

So Drake was complaining about a program that cost 300 times as much as the one he championed (ultimately, Trailblazer cost \$1.2 billion, so actually 400 times as much). It’s not an apples-to-apples comparison. Trailblazer, according to a government filing, worked across more platforms. ThinThread, according to a Siobhan Gorman story, had additional functionality, including privacy protections.

But still, Drake complained about a program that did what ThinThread did—at 300 to 400 times the cost.

As one of the other NSA employees who whistleblaw about Trailblazer, J. Kirk Wiebe, explains,

“How does a man see 9/11 happened, know that some part of it is due to corruption and mismanagement and sleep at night. How does a man do that? He obviously couldn’t,” Wiebe told Pelley.

Yet the government wants to put Drake in jail for 35 years because he tried to make sure incompetence that led to 9/11 doesn’t continue.