



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on July 9, 2014

Greenwald: GOP Official Spied on by NSA Without Warrants

The NSA warrantless surveillance program nominally geared at spying on foreigners has also spied on innocent Americans without a warrant, including a Republican Party operative, a civil rights activist and several university professors. The [revelations by investigative journalist Glenn Greenwald](#) raise the possibility that NSA warrantless surveillance has been used for political — rather than security — purposes.



Greenwald’s July 9 revelations — based upon information supplied by whistleblower Edward Snowden — profile five innocent American citizens who were surveiled without the constitutionally-required warrant from a court based upon probable cause: Republican Party operative Faisal Gill, Attorney Asim Ghafoor (a former aide to Democratic Congressman Ciro Rodriguez of Texas), Rutgers University Professor Hooshang Amirahmadi, Former California State University Professor Agha Saeed (an opponent of the USA Patriot Act) and Council on Islamic-American Relations Executive Director Nihad Awad. Greenwald’s sample of about 7,500 e-mail addresses monitored by the NSA (the NSA monitors many more than that number) contains 202 addresses positively identified as “U.S. persons,” 1,782 as foreigners and 5,501 persons as of “unknown” national origin.

Greenwald noted that all five Americans surveiled happened to be Muslim, and suggested that this may be a religious test for surveillance. Indeed, FBI training documents [revealed by Wired.com](#) in 2011 view all Muslims as potential radical, bomb-throwing terrorists or allies of those terrorists. And Greenwald’s July 9 research reveals an internal NSA training document uses “Mohammad Raghead” as a placeholder for surveillance targets.

That, plus the surveillance of American-Muslim civil rights organizations such as CAIR, angers Nihad Awad. “I’m outraged as an American citizen that my government, after decades of civil rights struggle, still spies on political activists and civil right activists and leaders,” the CAIR Executive Director told Greenwald. “I’m really angry that despite all the work that we have been doing in our communities to serve the nation, we are treated with suspicion.”

Faisal Gill told Greenwald’s researchers that the surveillance of Muslims “just goes to show the hysteria that everybody [in intelligence agencies] feels that every Muslim is, basically, somehow harboring these feelings, and that’s just not the case.”

Ironically, Gill has worked for the Department of Homeland Security and holds a top-secret clearance from the federal government. “I’ve done everything in my life to be patriotic,” Gill told Greenwald’s *The Intercept* in a [video interview](#). “I served in the Navy, served in the government, was active in my community — I’ve done everything that a good citizen, in my opinion, should do.”

The warrantless surveillance of Faisal Gill — a man who worked for the U.S. government and held security clearance — means few Americans would be immune from warrantless surveillance if they draw the attention of the NSA.



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Greenwald acknowledges that “Many of the email addresses on the list appear to belong to foreigners whom the government believes are linked to Al Qaeda, Hamas, and Hezbollah. Among the Americans on the list are individuals long accused of terrorist activity, including Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Khan, who were killed in a 2011 drone strike in Yemen.” But it didn’t end with those targets, since the surveillance was not limited by the Fourth Amendment requirements for probable cause and a warrant. Greenwald revealed innocent Americans have been caught in the unconstitutional surveillance dragnet: “A three-month investigation by *The Intercept* — including interviews with more than a dozen current and former federal law enforcement officials involved in the FISA process — reveals that in practice, the system for authorizing NSA surveillance affords the government wide latitude in spying on U.S. citizens.”

The unconstitutional surveillance is reminiscent of the NSA’s [Operation Shamrock](#) back in the 1960s, or the FBI’s [COINTELPRO](#) program, both of which authorized warrantless surveillance of Americans involved in civil rights work until properly shut down by the Church and Pike committees of Congress in the mid-1970s. Indeed, NSA warrantless surveillance of CAIR Executive Director Nihad Awad has a direct parallel to identical surveillance of Southern Christian Leadership Conference founder Martin Luther King, Jr. in the 1950s and 1960s.

The NSA issued a denial that it was targeting American political operatives, telling Greenwald that “No U.S. person can be the subject of FISA surveillance based solely on First Amendment activities, such as staging public rallies, organizing campaigns, writing critical essays, or expressing personal beliefs.” But the reality is that the warrantless surveillance has no real checks against abuse, and the NSA Inspector General has acknowledged that dozens of abuses of intelligence have already occurred. In a couple of instances, NSA analysts used warrantless surveillance data to spy on their wives, girlfriends, and would-be girlfriends in an abuse that spawned the intelligence community [neologism “LOVEINT.”](#)

Greenwald’s revelations involve actual NSA reading of e-mail content of American citizens without a warrant, which is different from the meta-data telephony program where the NSA collects the time, numbers, and duration of every American’s telephone calls without a warrant. Under the telephony program, the audio or transcript of telephone calls are not collected. But because the NSA compartmentalizes its surveillance programs, it is unclear if the surveillance of these five Americans also suffered NSA surveillance of phone calls under a different program in addition to reading the contents of e-mails described in Greenwald’s report.

This latest revelation reveals how far from the principles of the Fourth Amendment — which requires a warrant and probable cause for searches of people’s private effects — that the United States government has drifted. “If we do not speak up against the abuses of the NSA surveillance,” Nihad Awad noted, “it’s just a matter of time [before it comes] to you as it has come to us.”



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