

# Report on U.S. Global Listening

Washington

A worldwide electronic monitoring network of the National Security Agency was about to be revealed last week before Senate hearings were abruptly postponed, the Los Angeles Times has learned.

Investigators for the Senate select committee on intelligence activities had planned to disclose that the NSA for years provided FBI officials with information gleaned from overseas phone calls and cables.

The NSA's data was derived from a highly sophisticated, computerized system that has monitored foreign telephone calls and cables on a vast scale, according to knowledgeable sources.

A former high-ranking member of the U.S. intelligence community told the Times this system had "an amazing capability" beyond that of most other nations.

According to this official and another source involved in the system, the NSA gave the FBI secret data purportedly for domestic security reasons.

But it was understood that the Justice Department, the parent organization of the FBI, curbed this arrangement within the past two years because it became difficult to separate domestic security intelligence from information that could have a bearing on criminal cases.

Department officials feared that possible criminal cases against U.S. citizens could be legally tainted if they were based, at least in part, on phone calls that were recorded without a warrant.

On the eve of the scheduled Senate hearings last Tuesday, Attorney General Edward Levi, at the request of President Ford, paid an eleventh-hour visit to Senator Frank Church (Dem-Idaho), chairman, and the other committee members.

According to committee spokesman Spencer Davis, Levi made a "generalized appeal" for postponement of the hearings on national security grounds. The panel voted to honor the administration's request until the matter could be further explored.

"The committee was not trying to destroy the electronic surveillance capabilities of the NSA," a committee source said. "The abuse of these capabilities was the reason for our hearings. We were not about to reveal the techniques."

The Times' sources said these

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techniques were so sensitive they could not be described publicly.

According to knowledgeable officials, the NSA monitors millions of overseas phone calls, as well as those within foreign countries, as part of its code-breaking and foreign intelligence-gathering operations. It also intercepts certain radio and cable communications.

The agency does not monitor domestic phone calls, they said, although U.S. citizens can be overheard when they are parties to overseas calls. Since the quantity is so large, the NSA uses computers to screen out irrelevant conversations that have no intelligence value, one source said.

These computers are programmed to scan conversations and record those where key words are used, including the names of particular persons or organizations.

The Senate committee is also understood to be investigating evidence that the FBI furnished the NSA with a "watch list" of U.S. citizens whose overseas calls were of interest to the bureau.

Congressional sources said the FBI, in turn, assisted the NSA by breaking into foreign embassies to obtain code-books and other material to help the agency decipher intercepted messages.

An official of the House committee said last summer that the NSA collected so much information it burned 30 tons of classified wastepaper a day.

A. Searle Field, the committee's chief counsel, said that figure indicated "a tremendous volume of collection and nowhere near an equal volume of analysis."

The NSA, which is part of the Defense Department, was created by executive order in 1952. Although its budget is secret, it is reported to total several billion dollars a year.

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