

Global Surveillance: The Evidence for Echelon

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This presentation sets out the historical, factual and evidential basis for our knowledge and understanding of highly classified matters concerning the mass global interception and processing of civil and commercial telecommunications. Such understanding is important in underpinning discussion of the political and technical interventions that can secure personal and commercial communications and provide data security in the 21st century.

Since 1996, there has been increasing global interest in and awareness of the extent of the automated surveillance of global telecommunications systems, primarily but not exclusively by the signals intelligence (sigint) agencies of the United States and its English-speaking allies. Although many thousands of codenames are in use, the technically-informed public now commonly know this system as “Echelon”.

Recent information suggests that the original Echelon system came into existence about 1971, and that within the signals intelligence agencies it was (and remains) the commercial communications satellite (COMSAT) collection sub-system of the global communications surveillance system. The existence of the Echelon network was first publicised in the late 1980s, when it underwent an unprecedented enlargement, including the development of southern hemisphere interception sites. Development has continued on an ever-increasing basis since 1990.

This presentation reports and attempts to and assimilate the best available evidence for the interception and processing capabilities of such systems, together with their implications for personal and commercial privacy and security. It also reviews the legal authority controlling such activities, and such privacy procedures as have been disclosed. A key contemporary issue is whether the technological processes now associated with automated communications intelligence effectively nullify privacy protection safeguards, such as are set out in statutes such as the US Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA).

It is a matter of record that the signals intelligence agencies have struggled for more than 50 years to prevent access to or the general use of effective cryptographic methods by private citizens or by organisations not generally under their control. They now recognise this as a losing battle, and are in the process of redirecting their efforts. A review of clandestine interception methods may provide pointers to new systems to be deployed in future.

Reaction to the STOA “Interception Capabilities 2000” report : May – June 1999

“This is by far the most authoritative document ever prepared on just what snooping is being done into your and my telecommunications”. Sunday Programme, Channel 9 TV, Australia : 23 May 1999

“The report is undoubtedly the most comprehensive look at Echelon to date because of its attention to detail — [and] the NSA’s use of technology” Wired, 10 May 1999.

“Son investigation est tout à fait explosive; elle rappelle, détails à l’appui, que l’appareil de renseignement américain, et son appendice britannique, espionne et traque les communications internationales depuis le début du siècle”. Le Point, 21 May 1999

“Eine Vorstellung wie aus der Phantasie eines Paranoikers: Ob wir über Handy oder Festnetz telefonieren, E-Mail schreiben, Dateien übers Internet verschicken - kein Wort sei sicher vor dem Zugriff internationaler Geheimdienste, die systematisch und in großem Maßstab nahezu alle Wege, auch den zivilen elektronischen Datenverkehr, belauschen und für ihre Zwecke auswerten”. Der Spiegel, 21 May 1999.

“This extremely thorough document took a bit of the gloss of omniscience off of Echelon, but confirmed that it’s an extremely powerful network, and one that in some ways is untouched by human hands.” About.com, 3 June 1999.

“I believe that it’s time that there is some congressional scrutiny of the Echelon project ... Echelon has raised some questions about fundamental policy and constitutional rights.” US Congressman and former CIA General Counsel Bob Barr, (quoted in Wired, 10 May 1999)

The STOA report on Comint - Interception Capabilities 2000 (IC-2000) - is currently available from :

http://www.gn.apc.org/duncan/stoa_cover.htm

The European Parliament site is :

<http://www.europarl.eu.int>

The exact URL will be advised, when available.

There are mirrors at :

UK http://www.cyber-rights.org/interception/stoa/stoa_cover.htm

UK http://www.ipvtreports.mcmail.com/stoa_cover.htm

Netherlands <http://www.nrc.nl/W2/Lab/Echelon/interccapabilities2000vp.htm> (modified)

Germany <http://www.spiegel.de/statichtml/stoa/index.htm>

Germany http://www.ez-info.com/c3/stoa_cover.htm

Australia http://www.c2o.org/mirrors/duncan/stoa_cover.htm

USA <http://anon.efga.org:8080/OtherSites/Interception>

USA http://www.Genocide2600.com/~tattooman/cryptography/nsa/ic2000/stoa_cover.htm

USA <http://members.atlantisnetwork.com/qubit/ic200.htm> (jazzed up, not recommended)

The zipped file can be obtained from <http://jya.com/ic2000.zip> and also from <http://www.gn.apc.org/duncan/ic2000.zip>

You can ask for a printed copy from the Scientific and Technological Options Assessment (STOA) Panel office at the European Parliament, Luxembourg. Fax number: 352-4300-22418

Or write to either :

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The **previous STOA report** in this series also covers ECHELON. It can be obtained from STOA (as above) or can be read on-line at: <http://www.heise.de/tp/deutsch/special/info/6280/anchor1.html>

Special electronic spying page on Yahoo: <http://headlines.yahoo.com/FC/World/ECHELON/>

Another, short list of links is at <http://antimedia.net/echelon>

Coverage by Country

UNITED STATES

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<http://cgi.pathfinder.com/time/digital/daily/0%2C2822%2C27293%2C00.html>

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