



NSA ORDERS EMPLOYEES TO SPY ON THE WORLD “WITH DIGNITY AND RESPECT”

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[Ken Klippenstein](#)

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The National Security Agency's data collection center in Bluffdale, Utah, on March 17, 2017. Photo: George Frey/Getty Images

THE NATIONAL SECURITY AGENCY, the shadowy hub for the United States’ electronic and cyber spying, has instructed its employees that foreign targets of its intelligence gathering “should be

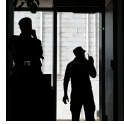
treated with dignity and respect,” according to a new policy directive. The directive, released this summer as internal guidance, is for the NSA’s vaunted signals intelligence, or SIGINT, division, which is responsible for covert surveillance and data collection worldwide.

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NSA Orders Employees to Spy on the World “With Dignity and Respect”

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“In recognition that SIGINT activities must take into account that all persons should be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their nationality or wherever they might reside,” says the [previously unreported directive](#), which was issued by NSA Director Gen. Paul Nakasone.

“Mass surveillance is fundamentally incompatible with basic human rights and democracy.”

Civil liberties experts say the PR-friendly directive is an attempt to mollify European partners and American critics amid a simmering congressional debate over whether to reauthorize the NSA’s broad surveillance authorities. Experts also

pointed to the absurdity that the NSA, an intelligence agency that specializes in electronic eavesdropping including the interception of text messages and emails, could do so respectfully.

“This is like the CIA putting out a statement saying that going forward they’ll only waterboard people with dignity and respect,” Evan Greer, director of the digital rights advocacy group Fight for the Future, told The Intercept. “Mass surveillance is fundamentally incompatible with basic human rights and democracy.”

The NSA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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Last month, President Joe Biden’s own advisers [recommended](#) imposing some limits on the warrantless surveillance programs of the U.S. intelligence community. The administration, though, rejected proposals that the U.S. obtain a warrant before sifting through certain information collected from Americans. That so-called Section 702 information, the repository of surveillance data established in the wake of the September 11 attacks, gets its name from the legal provision that authorizes it – the same statute that is being debated in Congress and among privacy advocates.

The NSA directive follows an [executive order](#) issued by Biden in October 2022 titled “Enhancing Safeguards for United States Intelligence Activities.” That directive, along with other Biden administration requirements, seeks to provide the same privacy and civil liberties protections to foreign intelligence targets – even to targets like Russian President Vladimir Putin.

June 2023 NSA Internal Directives for SIGINT Contributed by Ali Gharib (The Intercept)

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Experts, however, say the safeguards are largely window dressing intended to head off critics in Congress and Europe, where NSA surveillance is a sore issue. European governments and leaders were incensed when NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed the staggering power – and lack of checks – on the spy agency.

“The U.S. government wants to be able to warrantlessly spy on whomever it wants with no independent checks, no matter the scale or threat to privacy,” Sean Vitka, senior policy counsel for Demand Progress, a civil liberties advocacy organization, told The Intercept. “The government is putting up Potemkin villages to try and trick Europe – and the American people – into thinking the U.S. government’s out-of-control spying is somehow fixed, despite the fact that Congress hasn’t even had the chance to consider any serious reforms – which, it must be noted, the government is ferociously lobbying against right now, and has been all year.”