



WASHINGTON — A leaked document has laid bare the monumental scope of the government's surveillance of Americans' phone records — hundreds of millions of calls — in the first hard evidence of a massive data collection program aimed at combating terrorism under powers granted by Congress after the 9/11 attacks.

At issue is a court order, first disclosed Wednesday by the *Guardian* newspaper in Britain, that requires the communications company Verizon to turn over on an "ongoing, daily basis" the records of all landline and mobile telephone calls of its customers, both within the United States and between the United States and other countries. Intelligence experts said the government, though not listening in on calls, would be looking for patterns that could lead to terrorists — and that there was every reason to believe similar orders were in place for other phone companies.

National intelligence director James Clapper called the disclosure of an Internet surveillance program "reprehensible" and said it risks Americans' security. He also said he was declassifying some aspects of the monitoring to help Americans understand it better.

The unauthorized disclosure of a top secret U.S. court document threatens potentially long-lasting and irreversible harm to our ability to identify and respond to the many threats facing our nation," Clapper said in an unusual late-night statement.

Some critics in Congress, as well as civil liberties advocates, declared that the sweeping nature of the National Security Agency phone program represented an unwarranted intrusion into Americans' private lives.

But a number of lawmakers, including some Republicans, lauded the program's effectiveness. Leaders of the House Intelligence Committee said the program had helped thwart at least one attempted terrorist attack in the United States, "possibly saving American lives."

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said Americans have no cause for concern. "If you're not getting a call from a terrorist organization, you've got nothing to worry about," he said.

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., said the order was a three-month renewal of an ongoing practice that is supervised by federal judges who balance efforts to protect the country from terror attacks against the need to safeguard Americans' privacy. The surveillance powers are granted under the post-9/11 Patriot Act, which was renewed in 2006 and again in 2011.

The program has operated in the shadows for years, under President George W. Bush and now President Barack Obama.

Without confirming the authenticity of the court order, White House spokesman Josh Earnest said such surveillance powers are "a critical tool in protecting the nation from terror threats."

The Verizon order, granted by U.S. Judge Roger Vinson of Pensacola as part of the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court on April 25 and good until July 19, requires information on the phone numbers of both parties on a call, as well as call time and duration, and unique identifiers, according to the *Guardian*. (In 2011, it was Vinson who ruled that the individual mandate provision of the Affordable Care Act was unconstitutional.)

Privacy advocates said the program's scope is indefensible.

"This confirms our worst fears," said Alexander Abdo, a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union's National Security Project.

Verizon executive vice president and general counsel Randy Milch, in a blog post, said the company isn't allowed to comment on any such court order.

"Nevertheless, the law authorizes the federal courts to order a company to provide information in certain circumstances, and if Verizon were to receive such an order, we would be required to comply," he said.

The company listed 121 million customers in its first-quarter earnings report this April.