



Americans among Those Monitored in GCHQ and NSA Operations against WikiLeaks Website

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Anyone who has visited the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks.org may have had their online activity secretly monitored by the National Security Agency (NSA) and its British intelligence counterpart, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ).

This revelation is just the latest to surface from classified materials exposed by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

Using secret documents obtained by Snowden, the investigative news website The Intercept reported the NSA and GCHQ worked together to target WikiLeaks and its operators and supporters.

This campaign included collecting the IP addresses of any individual who visited the WikiLeaks website “in real time, as well as the search terms that visitors used to reach the site from search engines like Google,” Glenn Greenwald and Ryan Gallagher wrote at The Intercept.

The monitoring was just one part of a multi-pronged strategy used to go after WikiLeaks and the “human network” supporting it, according to one of the documents.

The spy agencies also went after the file-sharing site Pirate Bay and secret hacker groups, like Anonymous.

Another American classified document reportedly showed the Barack Obama administration wanted its foreign allies to file criminal charges against Julian Assange, WikiLeaks’ founder, for publishing previously undisclosed records of the Afghanistan war.

Still another document revealed that two NSA offices, including the agency’s top lawyer, wanted WikiLeaks designated a “malicious foreign actor” to justify its targeting by the agency.

One government secrecy expert, Julian Sanchez, a research fellow at the Cato Institute, said the latest revelation is a worrisome sign for Americans who guard their privacy.

“All the reassurances Americans heard that the broad authorities of the FISA [Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act] Amendments Act (pdf) could only be used to ‘target’ foreigners seem a bit more hollow,” Sanchez told The Intercept, “when you realize that the ‘foreign target’ can be an entire Web site or online forum used by thousands if not millions of Americans.”

-Noel Brinkerhoff