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Does technical knowledge matter when deciding on NSA spying?

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Anonymous · 27 minutes ago 🔒

This was brought in on a different thread but I think it deserves its own thread.

Over the weekend I watched the following talk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0SXO5KUZIo> by Peter Singer, co-author of <http://www.amazon.com/Cybersecurity-Cyberwar-Everyone-Needs-Know%C2%AE/dp/0199918112> .

Now, I am on record, even as anonymous, saying that it is a good thing that experts do not make policy in their area of expertise because they tend to favor their own bias and push for policies that favor their areas of expertise.

But what happens if the opposite is true, namely, that non experts have a very vague understanding of technology and make policy with simplistic analogies such as "metadata collection is like that thing of http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smith_v._Maryland " without fully understanding the potential for abuse when you have in a single database containing all that collected data?

From the above talk, it comes across that ignorance on so called "cyber issues" is widespread across political parties and branches, with US supreme court justices admitting that they don't understand email (not talking Facebook or Twitter, plain email!) , Obama replying to some technical presentation "translate that to English" and Republican and Democrat hawks speaking of cyberterrorism to justify increasing powers for the NSA.

What do you guys think?

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Karen West · 11 minutes ago 🔒



I know this thought has crossed my mind in recent times.

I don't know if this is a related post or not, but I posted this about 8 days ago:

https://class.coursera.org/conlaw-001/forum/thread?thread_id=2153

and another one before that (may have been a related post 15 days ago):

https://class.coursera.org/conlaw-001/forum/thread?thread_id=1842

It's comforting to know that I am not alone in wondering this too!

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Anonymous · 3 minutes ago 🔒

Hi Karen,

I hadn't paid attention to those threads, but yes, you are not the only one wondering about this.

In fact, every time I hear one of those establishment Republicans or Democrats, be it Mike Rogers or Dianne Feinstein say "oh, there is oversight, trust us", my head explodes. My head uber explodes when I hear somebody like Charles Krauthammer or Bill O'Reilly echoing similar talking points.

It's like, do these people know what they are talking about? You don't even need to be an uber expert, just use Google a couple of times understand the possibilities of current technology to datamine your life provided that the crunching machines have access to your data. The notion that the NSA is collecting humongous amounts of data on Americans without their consent and building "Google like" analytical tools on top of it should scare anyone. Anyone, except our political leaders, that is. One they they will be out of power and will be at the receiving end of spying too.

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