

# Whistleblower: NSA Targeted Journalists, Snooped on All U.S. Communications

By Kim Zetter January 22, 2009, Wired Blog

Just one day after George W. Bush left office, an NSA whistleblower has revealed that the National Security Agency's warrantless surveillance program targeted U.S. journalists, and vacuumed in all domestic communications of Americans, including, faxes, phone calls and network traffic.

Russell Tice, a former NSA analyst, spoke on Wednesday to MSNBC host Keith Olbermann. Tice has acknowledged in the past being one of the anonymous sources that spoke with *The New York Times* for its 2005 story on the government's warrantless wiretapping program.

After that story was published, President Bush said in a statement that only people in the United States who were talking with terrorists overseas would have been targeted for surveillance.

But Tice says, in truth, the spying involved a dragnet of all communications, confirming what critics have long assumed.

"The National Security Agency had access to all Americans' communications," he said. "Faxes, phone calls and their computer communications. ... They monitored all communications."

Tice said the NSA analyzed metadata to determine which communication would be collected. Offering a hypothetical example, he said if the agency determined that terrorists communicate in brief, two-minute phone calls, the NSA might program its systems to record all such calls, invading the privacy of anyone prone to telephonic succinctness.

Tice was involved in only a small part of the project, that involved trying to "harpoon fish from an airplane."

He said he was told to monitor certain groups in order to eliminate them as suspects for more intense targeting. Those groups, he said, were U.S. journalists and news agencies. But rather than excluding the news organizations from monitoring, he discovered that the NSA was collecting the organizations' communications 24 hours a day year round.

"It made no sense," he said.

Tice did not identify the reporters or organizations allegedly targeted.

Olbermann asked if this means there's a file somewhere containing every e-mail and phone conversation these reporters ever had with

sources, editors and family members.

"If it was involved in this specific avenue of collection, it would be everything, yes." Tice answered.