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## Government unveils 'Big Brother' plan: Now they want to snoop on every phone call, email and text message

By [James Slack](#)

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Plans for a massive expansion of 'Big Brother' state surveillance to cover every phone call, email, text message and internet visit in Britain were unveiled yesterday.

Home Secretary Jacqui Smith claimed that storing details of individuals' communications was vital to prevent further terrorist atrocities.

Activities which will be subject to snooping for the first time include visits to social networking sites such as Facebook, auction sites such as eBay, gaming websites and chatrooms.

Police and security services will not be able to access the precise content but will know each site visited, and to whom and when a phone call, text message or email was sent.

If this sets alarm bells ringing, they could seek a Ministerial warrant to intercept exactly what is being sent, including the content.

The billions of pieces of data are likely to be stored for a year or more. The cost is estimated to be at least £1billion, and could be far higher.

Last night MPs and privacy groups attacked the proposals as 'Stalinist', 'Orwellian' and a reversal of the presumption that a person is innocent until proven guilty.

One opponent said: 'They are making us all suspects.'

A leaked memo written by sources close to the project revealed it was fraught with technical difficulties.

Officials are split between placing the vast amount of data to be collected on a huge central Government database or forcing service providers to store the information, to be accessed on demand.

Currently, the option being worked on is to request data from the service providers, the memo reveals. They are likely to pass on extra costs to customers.

Shadow Home Secretary Dominic Grieve said: 'These proposals would mark a substantial shift in the powers of the state to obtain personal information on individuals.'

'Given the Government's poor record on protecting data and running databases there needs to be a full and proper debate.'

'The public will also be acutely aware of how, under this Government, surveillance powers designed to combat terrorism and serious organised crime have been used by local authorities to investigate things like fly-tipping. This would be absolutely unacceptable.'



**Home Secretary Jacqui Smith has unveiled plans for a massive expansion of 'Big Brother' state surveillance, covering every phonecall, e-mail, text message and internet visit in Britain**

Liberal Democrat spokesman Chris Huhne said: 'The Government's Orwellian plans for a vast database of our private communications are deeply worrying.'

'Ministers claim the database will only be used in terrorist cases, but there is now a long list of cases from the arrest of Walter Wolfgang for heckling at a Labour conference to the freezing of Icelandic assets where anti-terrorism law has been used for purposes for which it was not intended.'

'These proposals are incompatible with a free country and a free people.'



**We're watching you: An East German Stasi officer listens in on a couple in a scene from the Oscar-winning film *The Lives Of Others*. Jacqui Smith has unveiled plans for a massive expansion of state surveillance**

Phil Booth, of the NO2ID privacy campaign, said: 'This is the Stalinist vision which we always knew was on the agenda. Monitoring the entire population is a complete abhorrence, reversing the presumption of innocent until proven guilty and making us all suspects.'

But senior security and police services were adamant that, without the new powers, lives would be put at risk.

They said some investigations have already been affected by criminals who use technology to avoid detection, by plotting online through social networking sites or interactive games.

'Criminals are getting more sophisticated in using this technology and they are going to exploit it unless we do something,' one source said.

Miss Smith yesterday admitted the public had reason to be concerned.

In a speech to the Institute for Public Policy Research thinktank, she said: 'Of course, even if there had not been events [data losses], the British public would have every right to be sceptical about a state activity that involves the collection of data.'

But she said that, without increasing their capacity to store data, the police and security services would have to consider a 'massive expansion of surveillance'.

And she insisted: 'There are no plans for an enormous database which will contain the content of your emails, the texts that you send or the chats you have on the phone or online.'

'Nor are we going to give local authorities the power to trawl through the database in the interests of investigating lower level criminality under the spurious cover of counter-terrorist legislation.'

## Comments (65)

Does this mean all communications will be stored? If so will it be subject to the freedom of information act and the data protection act? Will the communications from the Royal Family be stored as well as Government Ministers, MPs and their families? It seems a little late but 1984 is starting to arrive so what next the british KGB? And what about those clever people who can hack into systems. The Americans know all about people hacking into systems containing sensitive information.

- Celtic Warrior, Wales, 15/10/2008 14:41

When you think Mrs Smith studied Philosophy at Oxford !? It makes you wonder... Did she only study the totalitarian ideologues? Was Nikolai Yezhov her role model?

- Curious, London, UK, 15/10/2008 14:37

I cannot see the value in this at all. It is possible to encrypt emails using free personal encryption key software, which is freely available online and already in use by many business people. If terrorists encrypted their emails to each other, then the government would gain nothing from intercepting them anyway. This is a huge undertaking, it will require a massive amount of tax payers money to manage and grossly invades the privacy of the public - for absolutely no valid reason whatsoever.

- Sue, Cheshire, 15/10/2008 14:36

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