

INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT

Privacy and Security Inquiry

Evidence from Dr. Michael P. Taylor [REDACTED]

Executive summary. It is inevitable that intelligence and security organisations will seek to grow their remit and budget, as all organisations do. It must be the role of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament to push back against this natural tendency. Specifically, recent policy changes have almost all tended to act in the interests of security at the cost of reducing civil liberties. While security is important, this tendency is regrettable and should be reversed.

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1. My name is Michael P. Taylor. I am a software engineer for Index Data Aps, and a Research Associate in palaeontology at the University of Bristol. **In this submission I speak only for myself.**
2. It is in the nature of all organisations to want to succeed, and to measure their own success in terms of growth: growth in budget, headcount, remit and reach. In itself, this is not an unhealthy tendency.
3. This is as true of intelligence and security organisations such as GCHQ just as it is for other organisations. In the absence of other incentives, these organisations will naturally seek to extend their budget and headcount, and to justify this by increasing their remit and reach.
4. For most organisations, there is a natural limit to growth imposed by competition, availability of resources, and market saturation. These forces do not act on intelligence and security organisations due to their special status as publicly funded monopolies; and the necessarily secret nature of some of their activity further set them apart from the market forces that usually limit growth.
5. As a result, it is in the nature of intelligence and security organisations, if left unchecked, to grow indefinitely – at great cost, both financial and in terms of liberty, to the states that fund them.
6. It must therefore be the role of the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament to push back against this natural tendency towards growth. Because the organisations in question will always tend towards growing their remit, an effective counterbalance from Parliament must always tend towards limiting that remit, allowing it to extend under only truly extraordinary circumstances and even then only for specified limited periods. Only in this way can a balance be attained.
7. In accordance with the natural tendency noted above, recent changes in intelligence and security policy in the UK have all been in the direction of extending the power of these organisations at the expense of civil liberties. Examples include the very high numbers of CCTV cameras in the UK compared with other countries; the ubiquitous electronic surveillance that has become apparent only due to the Snowden leaks, and the routine abuse of terrorism-related laws for non-terrorism-related uses, such as the detention of David Miranda at Heathrow Airport. It is now well established that at least some of these activities are illegal.
8. It is clear that the balance between security and privacy has drifted much too far in favour of the

former – most likely largely because intelligence and security organisations are well funded and well positioned to influence policy in their favour, while civil liberties are the concern of much smaller and less well-funded groups.

9. It is up to the Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament to reverse this trend and to prevent the repeat of the abuses of recent years. In the absence of a powerful, well-funded group advocating civil liberties in the UK, the Committee must be that group.

10. Claims that only metadata, not data, is recorded are an irrelevance. Metadata regarding phone-calls and emails (sender, recipient, date, time, location) is just as invasive as content, and suffices to establish many aspects of individuals lives that are properly private in a democracy. Indiscriminate collection of this metadata must be stopped, and existing record destroyed.

11. To ensure that this is done, a robust system oversight is necessary, with inspections carried out by inspectors not associated with the organisations they are inspecting. To ensure against the erosion of liberty, multiple independent oversight groups should each be given the power to inspect intelligence and security organisations separately.

12. In conclusion, our intelligence and security organisation do a necessary job and do it well. But the reason they exist is to protect a free society. When in the course of their duties they infringe on the very liberties they exist to protect, they must be reined in.