



GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS HEADQUARTERS

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GCHQ: our Intelligence and Security mission in the Internet age

GCHQ has two important missions: Signals Intelligence and Information Assurance. Our Signals Intelligence work provides vital information to support Government in the fields of national security, military operations, law enforcement and economic well being. The intelligence we provide is at the heart of the struggle against terrorism and also contributes to the prevention and detection of serious crime. GCHQ supplies intelligence to the UK armed forces, wherever they may be deployed in the world. Information Assurance is about protecting Government data - communications and information systems - from hackers and other threats.

GCHQ is heavily dependent on technology in order to execute our global missions. An increasingly rapidly changing digital world demands speedy innovation in our technical systems, allowing us to operate at internet pace, as the information age allows our targets to. One of our greatest challenges is maintaining our capability in the face of the growth in internet-based communications and voice over internet telephony. We must reinvest continuously to keep up with the methods that are used by those who threaten the UK and its interests. Just as our predecessors at Bletchley Park mastered the use of the first computers, today, partnering with industry, we need to master the use of internet technologies and skills that will enable us to keep one step ahead of the threats. **This is what mastering the internet is about.** GCHQ is not developing technology to enable the monitoring of all internet use and phone calls in Britain, or to target everyone in the UK. Similarly, GCHQ has no ambitions, expectations or plans for a database or databases to store centrally all communications data in Britain.

Because we rely upon maintaining an advantage over those that would damage UK interests, it is usually the case that we will not disclose information about our operations and methods. People sometimes assume that secrecy comes at the price of accountability but nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, GCHQ is subject to rigorous parliamentary and judicial oversight (the Intelligence and Security Committee of parliamentarians, and two senior members of the judiciary: the Intelligence Services Commissioner and the Interception of Communications Commissioner) and works entirely within a legal framework that complies with the European Convention on Human Rights.

The new technology that GCHQ is developing is designed to work under the existing legal framework. It is an evolution of current capability within current accountability and oversight arrangements. The Intelligence Services Act 1994 and the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 underpin activities at GCHQ - both existing systems and those we are planning and building at the moment. The purposes for which interception may be permitted are set out explicitly in the legislation: national security, safeguarding our economic well being and the prevention and detection of serious crime. Interception for other purposes is not lawful and we do not do it. GCHQ does not target anyone indiscriminately - all our activities are proportionate to the threats against which we seek to guard and are subject to tests on those grounds by the Commissioners. The legislation also sets out the procedures for Ministers to authorise interception; GCHQ follows these meticulously. GCHQ only acts when it is necessary and proportionate to do so; GCHQ does not spy at will.

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