

The National Security Agency routinely shares raw intelligence data with Israel without first sifting it to remove information about US citizens, [a top-secret document provided to the Guardian](#) by whistleblower Edward Snowden reveals.

Details of the intelligence-sharing agreement are laid out in a memorandum of understanding between the NSA and its Israeli counterpart that shows the US government handed over intercepted communications likely to contain phone calls and emails of American citizens. The agreement places no legally binding limits on the use of the data by the Israelis.

The disclosure that the NSA agreed to provide raw intelligence data to a foreign country contrasts with assurances from the [Obama administration](#) that there are rigorous safeguards to protect the privacy of US citizens caught in the dragnet.

Although the memorandum is explicit in saying the material had to be handled in accordance with US law, and that the Israelis agreed not to deliberately target Americans identified in the data, these rules are not backed up by legal obligations.

Although Israel is one of America's closest allies, it is not one of the inner core of countries involved in surveillance sharing with the US - Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. This group is collectively known as Five Eyes.

The relationship between the US and Israel has been strained at times, both diplomatically and in terms of intelligence. In the top-secret 2013 intelligence community budget request, [details of which were disclosed by the Washington Post](#), Israel is identified alongside Iran and China as a target for US cyberattacks.

While NSA documents tout the mutually beneficial relationship of Sigint sharing, another report, marked top secret and dated September 2007, states that the relationship, while central to US strategy, has become overwhelmingly one-sided in favor of Israel.

In another top-secret document seen by the Guardian, dated 2008, a senior NSA official points out that Israel aggressively spies on the US. "On the one hand, the Israelis are extraordinarily good Sigint partners for us, but on the other, they target us to learn our positions on Middle East problems," the official says. "A NIE [National Intelligence Estimate] ranked them as the third most aggressive intelligence service against the US."

Later in the document, the official is quoted as saying: "One of NSA's biggest threats is actually from friendly intelligence services, like Israel."

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/11/nsa-americans-personal-data-israel-documents>

James Bamford, a journalist who has closely tracked the NSA over the years, wrote that Mr. Snowden stressed that the transfer of intercepts to Israel contained the communications — email as well as phone calls — of countless Arab- and Palestinian-Americans whose relatives in Israel and the Palestinian territories could become targets based on the communications. “I think that’s amazing,” he told me. “It’s one of the biggest abuses we’ve seen.”

... It appears that Mr. Snowden’s fears were warranted. Last week, 43 veterans of Unit 8200 — many still serving in the reserves — [accused the organization of startling abuses](#). In a letter to their commanders, to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and to the head of the Israeli army, they charged that Israel used information collected against innocent Palestinians for “political persecution.” In testimonies and interviews [given to the media](#), they specified that data were gathered on Palestinians’ sexual orientations, infidelities, money problems, family medical conditions and other private matters that could be used to coerce Palestinians into becoming collaborators or create divisions in their society.

The veterans of Unit 8200 declared that they had a “moral duty” to no longer “take part in the state’s actions against Palestinians.” An Israeli military spokesman disputed the letter’s overall drift but said the charges would be examined.

It should trouble the American public that some or much of the information in question — intended not for national security purposes but simply to pursue political agendas — may have come directly from the N.S.A.’s domestic dragnet. According to documents leaked by Mr. Snowden and [reported by the British newspaper The Guardian](#), the N.S.A. has been sending intelligence to Israel since at least March 2009.

Although the memo emphasizes that Israel should make use of the intercepts in accordance with United States law, it also notes that the agreement is legally unenforceable. “This agreement,” it reads, “is not intended to create any legally enforceable rights and shall not be construed to be either an international agreement or a legally binding instrument according to international law.”

It should also trouble Americans that the N.S.A. could head down a similar path in this country. Indeed, there is some indication, from a top-secret 2012 document from Mr. Snowden’s leaked files that I saw last year, that it already is. The document, from Gen. Keith B. Alexander, then the director of the N.S.A., notes that the agency had been compiling records of visits to pornographic websites and proposes using that information to damage the reputations of people whom the agency considers “radicalizers” — not necessarily terrorists, but those attempting, through the use of incendiary speech, to radicalize others.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/17/opinion/israels-nsa-scandal.html>

