



transparency from the security services.

Britain's eavesdropping agency GCHQ and the US National Security Agency were at the centre of a storm in 2013 over the extent of their snooping following leaks from former US intelligence contractor Snowden.

GCHQ uses bulk interception to uncover threats by finding patterns and associations to trigger leads, a tactic that the report said was a crucial and appropriate first step provided it was properly targeted and controlled.

Analysts can only examine individual communications on the authorisation of a government minister, and committee member Hazel Blears said "only a very tiny percentage of those collected are ever seen by human eyes".

This amounted to thousands of items a day, according to the report, in which the exact number was blanked out.

It said the items read included "only the ones considered to be of the highest intelligence value".

"Given the extent of targeting and filtering involved, it is evident that while GCHQ's bulk interception capability may involve large numbers of emails, it does not equate to blanket surveillance, nor does it equate to indiscriminate surveillance," Blears said.

"GCHQ is not collecting or reading everyone's emails: they do not have the legal authority, the resources, or the technical capability to do so."

The committee found that the intelligence agencies did not seek to circumvent the law, but Blears said the legal framework was "unnecessarily complicated and—crucially—lacks transparency".

The report recommended that the tangle of current laws on intrusion be replaced by a new, single piece of legislation.

The report also found each spy agency had disciplined or sacked staff for inappropriately accessing personal information held in the datasets.

Shami Chakrabarti, director of rights campaign group Liberty, said the parliamentary committee was simply a "mouthpiece for the spooks".

"No doubt it would be simpler if we went along with the spies' motto of 'no scrutiny for us, no privacy for you'—but what an appalling deal for the British public," she said.

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