

Report says France operates PRISM-like spy network

4 July 2013

A leading French newspaper says France's intelligence services have put in place a giant electronic surveillance gathering network.

Citing no sources, the Le Monde daily says France's Direction Generale de la Securite Exterieur, the country's foreign intelligence agency, systematically collects information about all electronic data sent by computers and telephones in France, as well as communications between France and abroad.

According to Le Monde, data on "all emails, SMSs, telephone calls, Facebook and Twitter posts" are collected and stored in a massive three-floor underground bunker at the DGSE's headquarters in Paris. The paper specified that it is the communications' metadata—such as when was call was made and where an author was when she sent an email—that is being archived, not their content.

Officials at the DGSE did not answer phone calls or emails seeking comment Thursday.

The vast archive, which Le Monde says amounts to tens of millions of gigabytes, is accessible to France's other [spy agencies](#), including military intelligence, domestic intelligence, Paris police and a special [financial crimes](#) task force.

Le Monde compared the French digital dragnet to PRISM, the U.S. National Security Agency program which has most caught the imagination of Internet users. But PRISM appears aimed at allowing U.S. spies to peel data off the servers of Silicon Valley firms—whereas the program described in Le Monde appears to be fed through the mass interception of electronic data bouncing across the world.

Also, PRISM can apparently be used to collect content, not just metadata.

Le Monde said the French [surveillance program](#) relies on spy satellites, listening stations in French overseas territories or former colonies such as Mayotte or Djibouti, and information harvested from [undersea cables](#)—all three of which are methods long familiar to the NSA.

A French lawmaker played down the report, saying France's surveillance gathering system is not comparable with the NSA's.

Patricia Adam, a lawmaker who until last year headed parliament's intelligence committee, said French spies "are line fishing, not trawling" the vast oceans of data thrown up by mobile phones, emails and Internet communication.

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