Echelon

Article URL
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Published: 12 September 2006

Last updated on 08 February 2008.

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Echeleon is the so called *spy network of the world*

. Some say it can (and does) monitor a electronic communication anywhere in the world. (phone, fax, radio, email, ...)

Before you read any further, I want you to know that Echelon is still not official acknowledged. Officially it doesn't exists. So anything on this page is pure guessing. However in the security world no one doubts it exists, just the scale on which its operates.

Ok lets start with some history.

It all started after the second world war, the cold war has began and the US and the USSR (Russia) wanted to know what the other one was doing. So they started tapping under-seas cables, intercepting radio transmissions, spy-satellites, ...
The US didn't do everything on its own, they had there greatest ally Great-Britain so they started the UKUSA alliance. Later expanded to include Australia, Canada and New Zealand. (maybe more countries?).
But the cold war ended.

Now this system is used track down organized crime, terrorist, drugs traffic, ... Thats good, nothing wrong with that. But there are rumours that it is also used to gain commercial advantage on companies and trade, thats wrong.

Like I already said before, I don't know if this is true or not. But I have a few remarks:
This is a monitoring system. It doesn't hack computers, doesn't break in. It just listen what is send around the world. If companies send there trade-secrets in clear text, well then they are just asking for it. If you do send important documents, at least encrypt them.

Who is doing what ?

The United States, with it's vast array of spy satellites and listening posts, monitors most of Latin America, Asia, Asiatic Russia and northern China. Britain listens in on Europe and Russia west of the Urals as well as Africa. Australia hunts for communications originating in Indochina, Indonesia and southern China. New Zealand sweeps the western Pacific.

The US takes the biggest role, they provide most of the technologies. The agency that controls Echelon is NSA (National Security Agency) also nicknamed No Such Agency. The US has many overseas bases and some might be used to gather data.

How does the system work ?

Basicly, they have supercomputers that search for keywords and patterns of messages. These computers have voice-recognition (speach-recognition) software and can understand many different languages. There are hundreds of these keywords and each country of the UKUSA alliance can add there own words.

So basicly, if you send a email they are watching it. If you talk on your cellphone, they are listening. In any language, anywhere in the world.

Now don't get all paranoid, it's not because they can, that they will. If you have done nothing wrong, you are not interesting for them, so they won't wast resources on you.
I mean take a look what you do everyday, and there are 6 billion people on this planet. There is so much data that, even with their supercomputers, it is unlikely they monitor everything.
Another aspect, most internal communication doesn't leave your country (even email). For example: In Germany 95% of all internal communication never leaves Germany. They need a base inside your country and access to the cable network. Ok they can spy on all satellite communication, but not on all cable-communications.

And don't think Echelon is the only one. It is said that France has a similar system (Franchelon), Russia is capable of it, China is a world power and India has a big IT-sector. They won't have such a big system as UKUSA alliance, but that doesn't mean they don't do it.

The only way to protect you from these systems is encryption. There are even encryption systems for cellphones, so use it whenever you can.
This doesn't mean the can't read it, it just takes them more time.

If you want to know more, here are some excellent sites:

* EchelonWatch.org

* Inside Echelon