



Should secret wiretapping be legal?

GETTING ORIENTED

The weekly passage covers aspects of the United States government that relate to the issue of wiretapping. Here is some information that might be helpful to students who are less familiar with the issue.

National Security Agency (NSA)

The NSA is an organization that is part of the United States Department of Defense. The NSA is responsible for collecting and analyzing information that is sent to the United States from other countries. The NSA also has the job of protecting information that is sent to other countries. One practice for protecting information is called *cryptography*. This word comes from the Greek word meaning hidden or secret. Before we used electronic systems, cryptography was the art of decoding or discovering secret messages. Now, computer science and electrical engineering are important in this work.



Constitution

The Constitution is a document that expresses the laws of the United States of America. It has been the official document of America since 1789. The American Constitution has become a model of government for many other countries. One of the laws makes it illegal for the government to listen to phone conversations without a judge's permission.



The Protect America Act

The Protect America Act gives the government the right to secretly intercept or interrupt communications from foreign countries if they are believed to be a threat to American safety. Before the Protect America Act of 2007, a court order was required to do this. A court order means that the government must give the information to a judge and give him/her time to analyze or figure out whether or not the information is threatening enough to allow the secret interception or wiretapping to occur. A court order is still required to intercept communications within the United States.





Should secret wiretapping be legal?

EVIDENCE AND PERSPECTIVES

	<i>Some may have this view:</i>	<i>But others may think:</i>
General Public	People want to feel like they are safe. They believe the U. S. Government will do what it has to do to protect them. They are willing to give up certain rights, such as the right of privacy, because they believe that doing so will help the government keep Americans safe.	Many Americans feel that giving the President the right to spy on people is too much power. They believe that we move away from our constitutional rights when we allow the President to make decisions without consulting—or discussing these decisions—with other branches of the government. The people who are opposed to or against this are not certain that allowing the President to secretly track communications will actually catch terrorists.
Government & Political Leaders	Government and political leaders take their jobs very seriously. They want Americans to be safe, and they are willing to give up some of their freedom to ensure the safety of others. Because political leaders always want to be reelected, they try to do what the majority of Americans believe is right so they will be reelected.	Not all political and government workers agree. Some believe that giving up our freedom goes against the Constitution. They believe people should be careful and pay attention to what is happening around them so that they can help if there is a problem.

- ✓ The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) calls the “Protect America Act” the “Police America Act.”
- ✓ The Protect America Act was an amendment to the America’s Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) which was signed by President Jimmy Carter in 1978.
- ✓ Telephone tapping (also known as wiretapping) is the monitoring of telephone and Internet conversations by a third party, often by secret means. The wiretap received its name because historically, the monitoring connection was an actual electrical tap on the telephone line.
- ✓ In 2010 a federal judge ruled that the NSA’s program of surveillance without warrants was illegal.
- ✓ Ethel and Julius Rosenberg are the most well-known American traitors. Ethel, 35, and her husband Julius, 34, were convicted under the Espionage Act of 1917 of attempting to sell atomic bomb secrets to the Soviet Union. They died in the electric chair on June 19, 1953.

Additional Information for Teachers

The American Constitution

www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/constitution.html

The argument of the ACLU

www.aclu.org/national-Security/aclu-fact-sheet-“police-america-act”

Cryptography

www.webopedia.com/Term/C/cryptography.html



Police mugshot of Ethel Rosenberg. Source: <http://arcweb.archives.gov/>
U.S. National Archives and Record Administration



Should secret wiretapping be legal?

ANNOTATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Features of Academic Text: *Dense and concise*

Academic language is more dense and concise than informal text.

Word Generation articles are more informal. Compare the third paragraph with the more formal version of it in the box.

Alina Woods was talking to her cousin in Mexico over the phone. She remembered hearing about **wiretapping** on the news. She had heard that the government was listening to international telephone conversations. Government officials were doing this so they could know if terrorists were planning attacks. Alina wondered if someone was listening to her conversation.

After the September 11th attacks, President Bush told the National Security Agency (NSA) to pay attention to conversations between Americans and foreigners who the government thought were **suspicious**. The NSA could tap phone calls, email accounts, and text messages as **sources** of information. He told the NSA officials to do this in secret, **notwithstanding** the fact that they were supposed to ask a court for permission. But President Bush said this secret wiretapping was necessary to keep the country safe. He called his new rules the Protect America Act.

Some people defend the Protect America Act because they think it will protect Americans from terrorists. They think that if a person seems suspicious, government officials should listen to that person's conversations and read his or her e-mail messages to gather information. People who support the President's new rules point out that the Protect America Act **eliminates** any possible delays in getting information about possible terrorists because the government does not have to wait for a judge's permission. They believe it ensures America's safety.

informal text

Other people are against the Protect America Act, notwithstanding the need for safety and security. They think wiretapping violates a person's right to privacy. The main concern of opponents is that the Protect America Act allows the President the power to spy without warning or court permission. These people think the price we are paying for security is too high and that we are giving up some of the personal freedom provided by the Constitution.

What do you think? Should secret wiretapping to help the government catch terrorists be legal? Or do you think, notwithstanding the risks of a possible attack, nobody should be able to spy on our conversations without telling us? Where do you stand? Remember someone may be listening!

Defenders of the Protect America Act claim that it protects Americans from terrorists by identifying suspicious people, listening to their conversations and reading their e-mails. Supporters of the law point out that it eliminates any possible delays in gathering information about suspected terrorists since the government does not have to wait for a judge's permission, thus ensuring America's safety.

academic text

Here are some differences:

- ✓ The academic version has 29 fewer words.
- ✓ The academic version is only two sentences while the less formal version is three sentences.
- ✓ The academic version does not repeat the words "Protect America Act" whereas the less formal version does.
- ✓ The academic version begins with the more abstract subject.

Should secret wiretapping be legal?

GENERATING WORDS



Using Prefixes

Prefixes are affixes that come before a word. Learning the meanings of some prefixes can help you recognize the meanings of many words.

Sometimes the prefix can have more than one meaning. The prefix *pro-*, for example, can mean either *before* or *continuing forward*.

- ➔ If you listen to a *prologue*, you listen to an introduction *before* the book or the play.
- ➔ If you *proceed*, you *continue* on doing what you are doing.



Discuss with a partner what the prefix *pro-* means in each of these words.



Can you think of other words that begin with the prefix *pro-*?

to protect (verb)

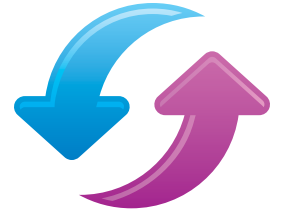
to program (verb)

progress (noun)

to produce (verb)



Write a sentence using one of the words from your list.



Should secret wiretapping be legal?

DEVELOPING DISCUSSIONS

Perspective Cards

The President of the United States is looking for some advice on whether or not the government should use secret **wiretapping** to fight terrorism. The President wants to hear as many perspectives on this issue as possible and has asked members of his government to interview people who may be **suspicious** of wiretapping.

Here is the perspective
of a famous inventor.

- ☒ “The technology might not work correctly and the government might listen to the wrong conversation. People who are not considered suspicious could have their phones tapped.”
- ☒ “I have inventions and ideas that I want to patent before other people; wiretappers could steal my ideas if they hear my conversations.”
- ☒ “They should tap all of the phones of government workers! They do more harm than anyone!”
- ☒ “It goes against the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution.”

Here are a few things that a
government agent might say when
interviewing the inventor.

- ☒ “We only use wiretaps on people under suspicion of terrorism.”
- ☒ “A quick wiretap might have prevented the 9/11 tragedy in New York.”
- ☒ “If you have nothing to hide, you will never notice if you have a wiretap or not.”
- ☒ “The information from the wiretap is not the only source of terrorism evidence that we use.”

Directions:

Step One: With a partner, decide who is going to be the inventor and who is going to be the government agent. Study the information on your card only.

Step Two: Have a discussion with your partner from your assigned perspective. You can use the information from your card; however try to not read from your card.