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JINSA Report #570

Data Mining and the War

We tried to get upset about the news that our government has collected and mined telephone routing information - not names, addresses or personal information Supreme Court has already ruled is not the property of the caller. It isn't clear to us what the value of mining such stupendous amounts of data would be, but another story this week makes us hope that a) they already got something useful, because they won't get any more of it, and b) they don't stop trying to figure out how terrorists talk to one another.

According to *The New York Times*, the perpetrators of the Madrid bombings had a computer version of a letter drop. Using shared e-mail accounts, one would write an e-mail and save it in the "Drafts" folder; the others would access the account, go to the "Drafts" folder, read and respond the same way. Accounts are accessible from anywhere but by not actually sending the e-mails, there was less of an electronic trail.

Javier Jordan, director of the Center for Security Studies and Analysis at the University of Granada, was quoted in the story saying, "This is probably a common method of communication among *ihadists* in Europe." But, according to *The Times*, "Mr. Jordan said he was skeptical that the authorities were as unable as they claimed to track unsent messages. 'There is still communication between the computer and the server,' wouldn't be surprised if the intelligence services have a way of monitoring that.

We wouldn't either, but we certainly wouldn't want to read about it in *The Times* if we do, they do!

If our government could, in fact, divine information from "Draft" folders, and was in fact doing so knowing it was a "common method of communication among *ihadists*" the *ihadists* that we could? Wouldn't you want them to think what they were doing was secure? Wouldn't you want them to keep doing it? Wouldn't you want us to keep mining it? Maybe we learned something from the Madrid bombing investigation that can be used by other agencies in other countries. Maybe we could improve our surveillance techniques and catch them BEFORE the next Madrid-type or London-type bombing. But once a program is exposed, you can be sure the bad guys won't do it again.

And this goes to the larger issue.

In this war between terrorists and the forces of civilization, the forces of civilization are always playing defense, meaning "catch-up." Every time journalists and their CIA leak sources give away details of the defense strategy, the terrorists change tactics and make the forces of civilization start over again. Guess which is harder?

There are those who believe that President Bush is waging a war that impinges on the civil liberties of Americans. They need to remember that it is the terrorists who are waging war - not against the President or against Republicans - but against America, our friends and our civilization.

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