



The senior lawyer for the National Security Agency stated unequivocally on Wednesday that US technology companies were fully aware of the surveillance agency's widespread collection of data, contradicting months of angry denials from the firms.

Rajesh De, the NSA general counsel, said all communications content and associated metadata harvested by the NSA under a 2008 surveillance law occurred with the knowledge of the companies – both for the internet collection program known as Prism and for the so-called “upstream” collection of communications moving across the internet.

Asked during a Wednesday hearing of the US government's institutional privacy watchdog if collection under the law, known as Section 702 or the Fisa Amendments Act, occurred with the “full knowledge and assistance of any company from which information is obtained,” De replied: “Yes.”

When the Guardian and the Washington Post broke the Prism story in June, thanks to documents leaked by whistleblower Edward Snowden, nearly all the companies listed as participating in the program – Yahoo, Apple, Google, Microsoft, Facebook and AOL – claimed they did not know about a surveillance practice described as giving NSA vast access to their customers' data. Some, like Apple, said they had “never heard” the term Prism.

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