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The Puzzle Palace: Inside the National Security Agency, America's Most Secret Intelligence Organization

By James Bamford



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In this remarkable tour de force of investigative reporting, James Bamford exposes the inner workings of America's largest, most secretive, and arguably most intrusive intelligence agency. The NSA has long eluded public scrutiny, but **The Puzzle Palace** penetrates its vast network of power and unmasks the people who control it, often with shocking disregard for the law. With detailed information on the NSA's secret role in the Korean Airlines disaster, Iran-Contra, the first Gulf War, and other major world events of the 80s and 90s, this is a brilliant account of the use and abuse of technological espionage.



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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In 1947, the governments of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand signed a secret treaty in which they agreed to cooperate in matters of signals intelligence. In effect, the governments agreed to pool their geographic and technological assets in order to listen in on the electronic communications of China, the Soviet Union, and other Cold War bad guys--all in the interest of truth, justice, and the American Way, naturally. The thing is, the system apparently catches everything. Government security services, led by the U.S. National Security Agency, screen a large part (and perhaps all) of the voice and data traffic that flows over the global communications network. Fifty years later, the European Union is investigating possible violations of its citizens' privacy rights by the NSA, and the Electronic Privacy Information Center, a public advocacy group, has filed suit against the NSA, alleging that the organization has illegally spied on U.S. citizens.

Being a super-secret spy agency and all, it's tough to get a handle on what's really going on at the NSA. However, James Bamford has done great work in documenting the agency's origins and Cold War exploits in *The Puzzle Palace*. Beginning with the earliest days of cryptography (code-making and code-breaking are large parts of the NSA's mission), Bamford explains how the agency's predecessors helped win World War II by breaking the German Enigma machine and defeating the Japanese Purple cipher. He also documents signals intelligence technology, ranging from the usual collection of spy satellites to a great big antenna in the West Virginia woods that listened to radio signals as they bounced back from the surface of the moon.

Bamford backs his serious historical and technical material (this is a carefully researched work of nonfiction) with warnings about how easily the NSA's technology could work against the democracies of the world. Bamford quotes U.S. Senator Frank Church: "If this government ever became a tyranny ... the technological capacity that the intelligence community has given the government could enable it to impose total tyranny, and there would be no way to fight back, because the most careful effort to combine together in resistance to the government ... is within the reach of the government to know." This is scary stuff. --*David Wall*

Review

"There have been glimpses inside the NSA before, but until now no one has published a comprehensive and detailed report on the agency. . . Mr. Bamford has emerged with everything except the combination to the director's safe." —**The New York Times Book Review**

About the Author

James Bamford's **The Puzzle Palace** was a national bestseller when it was first published and now regarded as a classic. He was until recently Washington Investigative Producer for ABC's **World News Tonight with Peter Jennings** and has written investigative cover stories for the **New York Times Magazine**, the **Washington Post Magazine**, and the **Los Angeles Times Magazine**.

Users Review

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