

Sharyl Attkisson: I Don't Think I Was the Only Reporter the Government Surveilled



BY **DEBRA HEINE**

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Although investigative journalist Sharyl Attkisson has strong forensic evidence that her home computer was remotely accessed by government entities, nothing has been done about it. The Department of Justice should be paying attention, because Attkisson believes she wasn't the only person who was improperly spied on during the Obama years.

Attkisson shared her story during [a House Oversight and Reform hearing](#) on Tuesday about [H.R. 4382, the Free Flow of Information Act](#), which would enshrine journalist-source protection into federal law.

Reps Jamie Raskin (D-MD) and Jim Jordan (R-OH) introduced the Free Flow of Information Act in November of 2017 "to protect the exercise of freely reporting critical information to the American public by establishing federal protection from compulsory disclosures for journalists."

Attkisson was reporting on the Benghazi scandal for CBS News in late 2012 when her computer records were surveilled by a government entity on multiple occasions. She is now the host of [Full Measure](#), a Sunday public affairs program.

She told Rep. Mark Meadows (R-NC) at the hearing on Tuesday that there was no doubt in her mind that the government had intruded into her computer.

"There's an actual fingerprint on the software that is used for this that they recognize themselves -- or that can be recognized -- that it's very unique," she explained. "It's a government proprietary software. And not only that, they didn't just look at my computer records, according to forensics. They planted three classified documents in my computer, they had a keystroke monitoring program in there, they used Skype -- which was on my computer -- to secretly activate it to exfiltrate files and listen in on audio."

She noted that a lot of people, including her, didn't know that Skype could be used for such purposes, but it's just one of many tools spooks use to access your computer remotely.

"I don't believe I was unique in terms of the only journalist this happened to," she added. "I was just one who found out about it because I had intel sources."

Attkisson explained to Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH) that it had never occurred to her that the government would be spying on her, as it sounded "so wildly crazy." However, two different individuals in the intelligence community -- who didn't know each other -- had approached her with the information indicating that she was being surveilled. She said the intelligence sources told her that **they were seeing practices being employed that "used to be strictly forbidden or controlled, but were now being done more liberally."**

Attkisson continued: "With help of another confidential source, and a FBI unit chief who helped connect me, we were able to get the first forensics exam, and they were literally blown away, according to them, when they saw this evidence. They were so

shocked because **there was a time when this would never have been done.**"

She noted that she could not and would not reveal her source, but "it's a government-connected person who knows exactly what government surveillance software does and looks like," she explained.

Before she and her legal team were able to present all of the evidence in court, her case was dismissed, Attkisson said.

"We presented some overviews and it was considered at the time plausible and we survived many motions to dismiss along the way, but after we added a telephone company to the lawsuit a couple months back, there was new considerations and the case was dismissed."

But Attkisson encouraged interested parties to look at the forensics -- especially at the DOJ, "for the sake of trying to find who did it or identify for their own purposes. Because I think they should be concerned and **I don't think I was the only one.** I think they really ought to be on that, personally," Attkisson added.





Attkisson has good reason to feel frustrated.


In 2013, she turned to DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz for help, handing over one of her personal home laptops to be examined. The investigation seemed to begin honestly and diligently, but over time became a half-baked exercise in obfuscation and stonewalling.

In a post at [The Hill](#) on March 1, 2018, Attkisson admits that she was advised by some of her intel sources not to trust the IG with her computer. She writes: "But I figured there was little downside. We already had our irrefutable forensics findings from our examinations. If the IG probe was competent and honest, as I expected it might be, then it could turn up names of the government actors responsible. If not, no harm done."

When the investigation was complete, the IG's office stonewalled Attkisson, refusing to let her see the final report. She was advised to file a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request. She writes: "I did so; under the law, a response was due within about 30 days. **It's been years.**"

The IG eventually released what Attkisson's attorney called a "wiped summary -- not the actual report or notes -- with spin that implied there had been no intrusion. This was quickly presented, publicly, by then-Sen. Al Franken (D-MN), who had gotten a copy of the summary with lightning speed; and it was dutifully reported by some in an unquestioning press."

In late February of this year, Attkisson discovered that the hard drive of one of her personal computers was secretly **switched out** with another while it was in the custody of the Justice Dept. inspector general:



Sharyl Attkisson 

@SharylAttkisson



Re: My govt. computer intrusions...What would you think if I told you the hard drive of one of my personal computers was secretly switched out w/another while in custody of the Justice Dept. Inspector General-- before they gave it back to me? (Tick-tock.) [#GettingCloserToAnswers](#)

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Attkisson explains:

Not long ago, my forensics team asked if I used that Apple computer after the IG returned it. My team was conducting a new exam. "No," I replied, "it hasn't functioned since before I gave it to the IG. I just stored it when they returned it. Why?"

"Because -- that's not your hard drive inside the computer they gave back to you," they told me. " ... We know the serial number on the hard drive when you bought it. We recorded the same serial number on our earlier forensics exams. This is a different hard drive. Completely different serial number. Not even close."

I would never have known if we hadn't gone back in that computer for additional forensics.

In addition to somebody changing the scope of the IG investigation midstream, and the office withholding from me the notes and the report on my own complaint, somebody also switched out my hard drive before the IG returned it to me.

Attkisson asks: "What does all this mean to the integrity of the DOJ's inspector general?"

Nothing good obviously, since the same IG botched its report on the FBI Hillary Clinton email investigation, and is currently investigating the FISA abuse scandal involving the FBI and DOJ.