Metadata can Kill

DCMI Conference 2021
“We kill people based on metadata.”

General Michael Hayden, Former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Agency (NSA), 2014 [quoted in Amnesty International report]
Early warnings

- 1980s Duncan Campbell raising the alarm about mass surveillance by GCHQ
- 2013 Amnesty International’s report on US drone strikes in Pakistan
- 2014 Edward Snowden’s revelations about NSA surveillance of metadata
Examples

- Targeting individuals (e.g. drone strikes)
- Control of public dialogue (arrest of activists based on social media activity)
- State-sponsored actions (infrastructure attacks)
- Mis-identification and false arrest
- Metadata manipulation (to cover cyber-criminal activity)
"'Drone Warfare - Killing by remote control - Drone strikes have killed more than 200 children alone in Pakistan & Yemen' (Ref. Book - Drone Warfare by Medea Benjamin. Pub. Verso 2013.)" by Activist Artist - Chris Holden is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
Social media monitoring

"Arab Spring [LP]" by Painted Tapes is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
Infrastructure

"electrical substation" by ugod is licensed under CC BY 2.0
Cyber-criminals

"Hacker" by Infosec Images is licensed under CC BY 2.0
What way forward?

- Due process and the rule of law
- Independent overview
- Upholding and protecting privacy
- Good governance (e.g. within security and intelligence community)
- Better regulation of telecoms and media
Is metadata neutral?

- Metadata
  - Used for
    - Good
    - Good intent can lead to
      - Harm
References

Daniel Solove (2014). Nothing to hide – the false trade-off between privacy and security


Thank you!

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