At NSA, sometimes computers make the policy calls

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John DeLong, the first-ever compliance director at the Pentagon's spy agency, spends his days making sure analysts are not snooping on Americans.

U.S. law forbids the National Security Agency from intercepting communications between citizens. While privacy advocates argue that NSA databases nevertheless accumulate records on Americans, in fact, some of those systems are calling the shots to delete that information.

"There are times when we use technology to literally make legal and policy decisions," said DeLong, 37, a lawyer whose additional math and physics degrees likely prepared him for the multifaceted task of policing code-breakers.

With an ever-increasing amount of messages to crack and data patterns to follow, agents have limited time to observe what he describes as "very specific procedures that govern their use and handling of that data." So, machines sometimes patrol privacy.

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