

Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001

(USA PATRIOT Act of 2001)

The USA PATRIOT Act was created in response to the attacks of September 11, 2001, and became law in less than two months after those attacks. With the support of members from across the political spectrum, it was passed nearly unanimously by the Senate 98-1 and 357-66 in the House.

General Provisions –

The USA PATRIOT Act of 2001 modified many major U.S. intelligence, communications, and privacy laws, including:

- the Electronic Communications Privacy Act (ECPA),
- the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act (the Wiretap Act),
- the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA), and
- the Communications Act of 1934

In addition, the PATRIOT Act amends other statutes that are less directly significant in the Information Sharing Environment, such as the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956, the Federal Deposit Insurance Act, the Right to Financial Privacy Act of 1978, the Fair Credit Reporting Act (FCRA).

The act improves counter-terrorism efforts in several significant ways -

1. The Patriot Act allows investigators to use the tools that were already available to investigate organized crime and drug trafficking –
 - Allows law enforcement to use surveillance against more crimes of terror.
 - Allows federal agents to follow sophisticated terrorists trained to evade detection.
 - Allows law enforcement to conduct investigations without tipping off terrorists.
 - Allows federal agents to ask a court for an order to obtain business records in national security terrorism cases.
2. The Patriot Act facilitated information sharing and cooperation among government agencies so that they can better "connect the dots."
3. The Patriot Act updated the law to reflect new technologies and new threats.

- Allows law enforcement officials to obtain a search warrant anywhere a terrorist-related activity occurred.
- Allows victims of computer hacking to request law enforcement assistance in monitoring the "trespassers" on their computers.

4. The Patriot Act increased the penalties for those who commit terrorist crimes.

- Prohibits the harboring of terrorists.
- Enhanced the inadequate maximum penalties for various crimes likely to be committed by terrorists.
- Enhanced a number of conspiracy penalties.
- Punishes terrorist attacks on mass transit systems.
- Punishes bioterrorists.
- Eliminates the statutes of limitations for certain terrorism crimes and lengthens them for other terrorist crimes.

Amendments –

The Act was reauthorized and amended twice: first by the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005 and then again by the USA PATRIOT Act Additional Reauthorization Amendments Act of 2006.

The USA PATRIOT Act Sunset Extension Act of 2009 amends the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005 to extend until December 31, 2013. The renewed provisions authorize roving electronic surveillance and the production of tangible things, including books, records, papers, and documents, for foreign intelligence and international terrorism investigations.

Source:

- <http://it.ojp.gov/default.aspx?area=privacy&page=1281#contentTop>
- <http://www.justice.gov/archive/ll/highlights.htm>