

Democrats ensure confirmation of NSA spy chief to head CIA

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The US Senate Intelligence Committee on Tuesday gave its support to General Michael Hayden, the principle architect of recently exposed domestic spying programs, to head the Central Intelligence Agency.

Leading Democrats joined Republicans in approving Hayden, the former head of the National Security Agency (NSA) and the current principal deputy director of national intelligence. Hayden is expected to easily win confirmation by the full Senate before the end of the week.

Four Democrats and all eight Republicans on the committee voted to recommend Hayden's confirmation by the full Senate, while three Democrats voted against. The four Democrats who voted for Hayden are among the most senior Democrats in the Senate: the ranking Democrat and vice chairman of the committee, Jay Rockefeller (West Virginia); Carl Levin of Michigan, the second-ranking Democrat on the committee; Dianne Feinstein of California; and Barbara Mikulski of Maryland.

By ensuring a wide margin on the Senate committee to confirm Hayden, the Democrats have once again given their imprimatur to the Bush administration's unprecedented attacks on democratic rights.

The vote came less than two weeks after a *USA Today* report that the NSA, under a program initiated by Hayden, has been secretly tracking the telephone calls of over 200 million Americans since shortly after 9/11. Without the benefit of court warrants, and in flagrant violation of federal statutes as well as constitutional safeguards against such government invasions of privacy, the agency has been amassing a vast database of telephone records turned over to it by the largest US telecommunications companies.

That revelation, in turn, was preceded by a December, 2005 *New York Times* exposé concerning another NSA

program, also initiated under Hayden, to secretly eavesdrop on phone calls of US citizens without a warrant. Both programs, which remained hidden from the American people for years, constitute an unprecedented step in the direction of an American police state.

The information banks on millions of Americans are aimed not at fighting terrorism, but at laying the groundwork for political repression on a mass scale. These measures are being implemented by a ruling elite that sees the greatest threat to its wealth and power coming not from bands of Islamic terrorists, but from among the American people. Under conditions of deepening social and economic crisis, with the gap between the financial elite and the broad mass of people continually widening, the intelligence and police apparatus wants to know what individuals are thinking, and with whom they are associating.

Hayden's central role in this anti-democratic conspiracy proved no obstacle to his approval by the Senate to head the CIA. Nor did the fact that both he and President Bush, in public statements made after last December's exposure of the NSA's warrantless eavesdropping on communications between the US and other countries, gave false assurances that the NSA's domestic spying was carefully targeted and strictly limited to suspected terrorists.

Last week's Senate Intelligence Committee confirmation hearing on the general's nomination was a stage-managed exercise in cowardice and duplicity. The entire process lasted a day, with an open session of few hours followed by a closed-door meeting of Hayden with the committee members.

In the open session, Hayden refused to reveal any concrete information about the domestic spying operations over which he presided, on the grounds that

the programs were classified and any public discussion of them would jeopardize national security and the so-called “war against terrorism.” The committee chair, Senator Pat Roberts, Republican of Kansas, used his opening remarks to deliver a McCarthyite attack on journalists and newspapers that informed the public about the existence of the secret programs, and on politicians who raised objections or called for investigations into the illegal operations.

None of the Democrats on the committee challenged Roberts’ demagogic attack, which was echoed by Hayden in his own opening statement. They either praised the general outright or couched half-hearted criticisms of his methods within affirmations of support for the “war on terrorism” and the need to strengthen the government’s spy agencies.

Hayden refused as well to answer questions on the CIA’s use of torture, renditions and secret detention facilities.

The results of the hearing were a foregone conclusion. Several of the principle Democrats had been present at briefings on the domestic spying programs given to selected members of the Senate and the House of Representatives by the Bush administration, and were therefore complicit in their implementation. Among the lawmakers who attended at least one of these briefings were Rockefeller, Feinstein and Levin, all of whom voted to confirm Hayden.

Following the vote, Levin declared absurdly that Hayden would “stand up to the president or anybody else who’s trying to get him to reach a certain conclusion on intelligence, and speak truth to power.” He added that Hayden had “some backbone and willingness to say no to power.”

During the hearing, in an exchange that could very well have been pre-arranged, Levin asked the general whether he had had some disagreements with Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld over the balance of power between the different intelligence agencies. Hayden confirmed that he had, and this was seized on by Levin and other senators as a sign of Hayden’s “independence.”

Dianne Feinstein showered praise on Hayden, describing him as “the leader and honest broker the CIA needs to regain its footing as the world’s premier spy service.”

The vote on Hayden is yet another sign that the

Democratic Party will seek to prevent opposition to the attacks on democratic rights from becoming an issue in the 2006 and 2008 elections, just as it is seeking to suppress popular opposition to the war in Iraq.

Even those Democrats who voted against the nomination issued statements emphasizing their support for “fighting the terrorists aggressively,” bolstering the central pretext used by the Bush administration to justify both the war and the assault on democratic rights.

The easy confirmation of Hayden is a signal from Congress that no serious investigation will be carried out into what is the most massive violation of privacy rights in the history of the United States. The Bush administration has refused to provide details of the programs, and investigations announced by the Justice Department and the Federal Communications Commission have been quickly called off on the grounds that the NSA program is classified.

The breakdown of American democracy is a product of the profound crisis of American capitalism, the vast growth of social inequality, and the determination of the American ruling elite to maintain its position through war abroad and ever greater attacks on the working population at home.

The confirmation of Hayden with crucial support from the Democrats underscores a fundamental lesson of more than a decade of anti-democratic conspiracies—from the impeachment of Clinton, to the theft of the 2000 election, to the launching of a war based on lies: Neither of the two parties and no section of the ruling elite has a serious commitment to the defense of democratic rights.

These rights can be defended only by the working class, and only through the building of its own mass, independent, socialist party.



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