

Obama defends massive spying on Americans

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President Barack Obama on Friday staunchly defended wholesale government spying on the phone calls, emails and other communications of the American people.

Speaking to reporters in San Jose, California in advance of his summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Obama referred to media exposés of secret data-collection programs by the Pentagon-based National Security Agency (NSA) that target hundreds of millions of Americans as “hype.”

He characterized the NSA's daily collection of telephone records of all customers of the major US telephone companies, first revealed Wednesday by the British *Guardian* newspaper, and the NSA and FBI's tapping into the servers of major Internet companies to access emails, photos, chats and documents, exposed Thursday by the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post*, as a “modest encroachment” on constitutionally protected privacy rights.

Obama defended these Orwellian surveillance programs with the standard, catch-all justification that they were needed to protect the American people from terrorist attack. He claimed they were legal because they were sanctioned by Congress and approved by the secret rubber-stamp courts that operate within the framework of the Foreign Intelligence Security Act (FISA). There were “a whole range of safeguards,” he declared, but said nothing concrete about the supposed checks on the spy and police agencies, since, like everything else about these programs, they are classified.

His remarks, from beginning to end, were a collection of sophistries and lies. He repeatedly insisted that “nobody is listening to your telephone calls,” as though, even if true, that would render harmless the possession by the military of detailed information on the social and political associations and daily habits of hundreds of millions of people. Similarly, Obama insisted that the Internet surveillance program—which does involve eavesdropping on the emails and other communications of millions of individuals—did not “target” Americans. In fact, any US resident who communicates with people

outside the country is liable to be swept up in this dragnet.

Nothing that Obama or any other government official says about state surveillance programs carried out under the cover of the “war on terror” can be taken for the truth. Just two months ago, James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, flat out lied to the Senate Intelligence Committee when he was asked whether the NSA spied on Americans.

The claims by Obama and other politicians, Democratic and Republican alike, that systematic spying on the entire population is motivated by the desire to prevent terrorist attacks deserve to be treated with contempt. This is being said in the midst of yet another sordid cover-up of evident state complicity in a terror attack on US soil. Once again in the Boston Marathon bombing, as in the 9/11 attacks and the abortive Christmas Day 2009 bombing of a commercial jet over Detroit, it turns out that the perpetrators were well known to the FBI, CIA and other agencies and multiple warnings were ignored.

Indeed, Obama himself alluded to the political motivations behind the government spying programs, commenting that after he leaves office, “I will be a private citizen, and I suspect that on a list of people who might be targeted... I'd probably be pretty high on that list.”

What is clear is that the real danger to the rights of the American people comes not from terrorists, but from within the American capitalist state. The police state measures put in place under Bush and expanded under Obama are directed against social opposition from the working class to the US ruling class' policies of austerity at home and endless war abroad.

The Constitution, the Bill of Rights and democratic rights as a whole are being shredded. In their place, barely concealed behind the increasingly hollow trappings of democracy, a dictatorship is emerging.

The Fourth Amendment, part of the Bill of Rights, states: “The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported

by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.”

Everything about the programs Obama defended Friday stands in obvious and direct opposition to this clear and unequivocal ban on state violations of privacy rights.

In his remarks Friday, Obama said that “you can’t have a hundred percent security and also then have a hundred percent privacy...” In other words, translated into plain English, the Fourth Amendment no longer applies. Likewise, as far as the administration is concerned, guarantees of due process, trial by jury, and freedom of speech, the press and assembly are no longer operative.

The disintegration of American democracy was underscored by the general response of the political establishment to the revelations of massive government spying. Prominent Democrats, such as Senate Intelligence Committee Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, rushed alongside their Republican counterparts to defend the NSA programs.

The relatively muted and scattered opposition from Democratic “liberals” and Republican right-wing libertarians, as well as criticism from press outlets such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, stopped well short of demanding an end to the programs, the dismantling of the NSA, the prosecution of intelligence officials, or impeachment proceedings against Obama, whose violations of the Constitution go far beyond anything carried out by Richard Nixon.

Meanwhile, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper late Thursday issued a ringing defense of the NSA programs and implicitly threatened to prosecute those responsible for exposing them to the public. He charged that the leaks will cause “long-standing and irreversible harm” to US national security, and called the “unauthorized disclosure of information” on the programs “reprehensible.”

The *New York Times*, for its part, published an article describing the author of *Guardian* articles on the two NSA programs, Glenn Greenwald, as being “obsessive” about government surveillance and asserting that Greenwald had “put himself... in the cross hairs of federal prosecutors.”

In his remarks on Friday, Obama referred back to the speech he gave May 23 at the National Defense University. In that extraordinary address, Obama defended his anti-democratic policies, such as extra-judicial drone assassinations, including of US citizens, while warning of the implications of such brazen

violations of the US Constitution. His speech reflected a deep crisis and sharp divisions within the state, and suggested that Obama felt his own position to be by no means secure.

On Friday, he made the strange assertion that he would “leave this office... *sometime* in the next three-and-a-half years.” [Emphasis added]. Obama is well aware of who really wields power—namely, the military/intelligence establishment in alliance with Wall Street. Should these forces become dissatisfied with Obama’s pursuit of their policies of social counterrevolution against the working class and global hegemony, and his readiness to make the changes in the forms of rule required to implement this agenda, he could be quickly dispensed with.

“If the people can’t trust not only the executive branch, but also don’t trust Congress and don’t trust federal judges to make sure that we’re abiding by the Constitution, due process and the rule of law” he added, “then we’re going to have problems here.”

In fact, the advanced stage of the collapse of American democracy is rapidly undermining support for the system within vast sections of the population. The turn to authoritarian forms of rule is, in turn, driven by the immense growth of social inequality and the increasing resort to criminality and war on the world arena.

Such a crisis of class rule signifies the emergence of a period of revolutionary upheavals. Capitalism means social inequality and war, which are incompatible with democracy. The only defense of democratic rights lies in the struggle of the working class for socialism.



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