

Obama administration initiates criminal prosecution of NSA whistleblower

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National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Joseph Snowden's release of classified documents detailing massive government spying has provoked a chorus of threats and denunciations across the US political establishment. The Federal Bureau of Investigation has launched a manhunt to find Snowden, who left his hotel room in Hong Kong out of concern for his safety. The Justice Department has commenced a criminal investigation into the leaks, confirmed spokeswoman Nanda Chitre over the weekend.

In material released to the British *Guardian* and the *Washington Post* last week, Snowden exposed two secret programs run by the Pentagon-based NSA that collect the telephone records of virtually all Americans and intercept the electronic communications of millions of people all over the world. The revelations have provoked criticism from politicians and the press in Europe and elsewhere, where the global spying operations are seen as a threat to the national interests of US opponents and allies alike.

In the US, for the most part, the sweeping and flagrant violations of the US Constitution's Bill of Rights have been defended by representatives of both big business parties, who have echoed the claims of President Obama and intelligence officials that the programs are needed to ferret out terrorists. In fact, the targets of these surveillance programs are not terrorists, but workers, young people, students and others deemed by the ruling class to be potential political opponents.

Rather than calls for impeachment proceedings or congressional hearings to investigate the police state surveillance architecture erected by the NSA, what has predominated are demands for retribution against Snowden.

In an extraordinary video interview given by Snowden, who came forward Sunday to identify

himself as the source for the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* articles, the 29-year-old NSA contractor said he expected to be targeted by the US government for extradition, life imprisonment or elimination. He declared, courageously, that he felt compelled to sacrifice his life, if necessary, to alert the public about the conspiracy against their democratic rights.

His assessment of the official reaction by Washington was rapidly confirmed. The Democratic chairwoman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Dianne Feinstein, having called on Sunday for the prosecution of those responsible for leaking news of the NSA programs, on Monday said of Snowden: "He violated the oath, he violated the law. It's treason."

To underscore the bipartisan support for the government spying programs, Feinstein appeared Sunday on ABC News' "This Week" program alongside her Republican counterpart in the House of Representatives. House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers declared on the program, "I absolutely think [those involved in the exposures] should be prosecuted."

Ralph Peters, Fox News analyst and retired Army lieutenant colonel, suggested Monday that Snowden should be executed for treason. "I mean," he said, "we need to get very, very serious about treason. And by the way, for treason—as in the case of Bradley Manning or Edward Snowden—you bring back the death penalty."

Republican Congressman Peter King of New York demanded Snowden's extradition from Hong Kong. He declared, "The United States must make it clear that no country should be granting this individual asylum... This person is dangerous to the country... If Edward Snowden did in fact leak the NSA data as he claims, the United States government must prosecute him to the fullest extent of the law and begin extradition

proceedings at the earliest date.”

Prosecution of Snowden will add to the Obama administration’s unprecedented record of targeting whistleblowers. The administration has prosecuted more individuals under the Espionage Act than all previous administrations combined. Those it has sent to prison include a former CIA agent who exposed on national television the use of torture at CIA “black sites.” At the same time, the administration has refused to prosecute Bush administration officials who authored and oversaw the torture programs.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney confirmed Monday that “There is obviously an investigation underway into this matter.” He refused to comment further on the investigation, while reiterating the absurd line that President Obama has upheld his promise to reverse Bush-era policies regarding warrantless surveillance.

“The government is not going to hold back on this case,” said Michael Vatis, associate deputy attorney general for national security in the Clinton administration.

Senator Mark Udall of Colorado, invariably described as an “outspoken” critic of government spying, took pains to declare his support for the “war on terror.”

“I come from this at the start acknowledging terrorism is a real threat, that we have to protect the American people,” he said Sunday. The Bill of Rights, including the Fourth Amendment ban on arbitrary searches and seizures, had to be balanced, he suggested, against the requirements of national security.

Udall’s talk of “balancing” illustrates the prostration and duplicity of the handful of Democratic politicians who posture as defenders of civil liberties. They begin with a defense of the “war on terrorism,” which is nothing more than a cover for imperialist war and the destruction of democratic rights.

The Fourth Amendment was not intended as a suggestion, to be applied when the state feels so inclined. The pervasive and secret spying operations of the NSA are totally incompatible with democratic rights as laid down in the US Constitution.

In a comment published Monday in the *Guardian*, entitled “Edward Snowden: Saving Us From the United Stasi of America,” Daniel Ellsberg wrote that an “executive coup” had unfolded over the past 12 years. “Since 9/11,” he wrote, “there has been, at first secretly

but increasingly openly, a revocation of the Bill of Rights for which this country fought over 200 years ago.”



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