Obama administration prepares charges against NSA whistleblower

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12 June 2013

The US Justice Department is preparing to file criminal charges against Edward Snowden, the intelligence contractor who has revealed the existence of vast and unconstitutional domestic spying programs, according to media reports Tuesday.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation is currently interviewing Snowden's family and friends in preparation for filing charges, and FBI agents visited the home of his father and stepmother in Pennsylvania Monday. That day, Snowden checked out of the Hong Kong hotel where he was staying, and his current whereabouts are unknown to the public.

The White House categorically defended its conduct of the domestic surveillance programs Tuesday. White House spokesman Jay Carney said at a press conference that Obama "believes as commander-in-chief that the oversight structures that are in place to ensure that there is the proper review of the kinds of programs that we have in place, authorized by Congress through the Patriot Act, and FISA do strike that balance" between constitutional rights and the interests of the state.

Snowden provided the *Washington Post* and *Guardian* newspapers with evidence of secret spying operations carried out by the National Security Agency behind the backs of the American people. His revelations included the publication of a secret FISA court order for US telecommunications giant Verizon to turn over all of its call records to the US government, as well as an internet surveillance system known as PRISM.

The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday against Obama administration officials, alleging that the spying program "gives the government a comprehensive record of our associations and public movements, revealing a wealth of detail about our familial, political, professional, religious and intimate associations." The ACLU added that the government spying program "is likely to have a chilling effect on whistle-blowers and others who would otherwise contact" the organization, whose telephone records were included in the Verizon FISA order.

"This dragnet program is surely one of the largest surveillance efforts ever launched by a democratic government against its own citizens," said Jameel Jaffer, the ACLU's deputy director. "It is the equivalent of requiring every American to file a daily report with the government of every location they visited, every person they talked to on the phone, the time of each call, and the length of every conversation."

Meanwhile politicians from both parties heaped denunciations on Snowden, accusing him of treason, which potentially carries the death penalty.

"He's a traitor," said Republican House Speaker John Boehner in an interview Tuesday with ABC News. "The disclosure of this information puts Americans at risk. It shows our adversaries what our capabilities are. And it's a giant violation of the law."

Boehner's comments echoed those of Democratic Senate Intelligence Committee Chairwoman Dianne Feinstein, who said Monday, "I don't look at this as being a whistle-blower... I think it's an act of treason."

Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell likewise called for Snowden's prosecution Tuesday, saying, "what is difficult to understand is the motivations of somebody who would intentionally seek to warn our nation's enemies of the programs, of the lawful programs, created to protect the American people, and I hope that he will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

In fact, what Snowden did was to reveal to the *American people* the illegal actions of the government,

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which views every citizen as a potential "enemy."

Snowden's revelations have created a crisis within the US state apparatus, exposing secret programs that have been implemented with the complicity of both parties and all institutions of government.

In response, the Obama administration organized a rare closed-door meeting with the entire House of Representatives to brief Congressmen on the spying operations. Lawmakers postured as critics of the programs, calling for establishing some mechanism for creating "oversight" of the illegal operations. Any such move would be aimed at institutionalizing unconstitutional operations directed at the American people.

The Obama administration has been caught in direct lies, with administration officials saying under oath that the US government does not collect information on millions of Americans.

Several Congressional Democrats rushed to defend the illegal spying programs. Democratic House Intelligence Committee member Jim Langevin said Monday that he and his fellow members of Congress "are comfortable with the capabilities used, the way they have been used and the due diligence exercised in making sure the agency responsible for carrying out and using the tools has been doing so within confines of the law," adding that "there is nothing nefarious going on here."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid attacked those within the political establishment who have raised tepid concerns, saying, "For senators to complain that they didn't know this was happening, we had many, many meetings that have been both classified and unclassified that members have been invited to. They shouldn't come and say, 'I wasn't aware of this,' because they've had every opportunity."

The preparation of criminal charges against Snowden by the US government and his denunciation by politicians coincided with an offensive by the US media intended to paint Snowden as a criminal, while attempting to manufacture popular acceptance of the government's spying activities.

Also on Tuesday, Snowden's employer, Booz Allen Hamilton, said that it had officially fired him, stating that "news reports that this individual has claimed to have leaked classified information are shocking, and if accurate, this action represents a grave violation of the code of conduct and core values of our firm." The firm added, "We will work closely with our clients and authorities in their investigation of this matter."

Hong Kong officials meanwhile indicated that they would likely comply with a US request for extradition. "Hong Kong is definitely not a safe harbor for him," said Regina Ip, chair of the New People's Party. "I think it would be wisest for him to leave Hong Kong because we do have bilateral agreements with the US and we are duty-bound to comply with these agreements."

Meanwhile Russia has indicated that it may consider giving Snowden asylum, saying, "If such an appeal is given, it will be considered. We'll act according to facts."

Snowden has indicated that he was concerned about his own safety, telling the *Guardian* Sunday, "You can't come up against the world's most powerful intelligence agencies and not accept the risk. If they want to get you, over time they will."

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