

# The NSA revelations and Obama's "pivot to Asia"

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Edward Snowden's revelations about the vast and illegal American electronic surveillance and spying operations inside the US and internationally have punctured the propaganda propagated by the Obama administration to justify its aggressive "pivot to Asia" aimed against China.

The US cynically presents itself as a force for regional stability, peace and "human rights" and the leader of Asian democracies—Japan, India and Australia—against the bullying of autocratic China. Under this guise, Washington has waged a determined offensive throughout the region to strengthen strategic alliances, build up military forces and consolidate trade ties in a bid to undermine Beijing's influence.

In the lead-up to the recent summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping, the Obama administration mounted a concerted campaign aimed at branding China as the number one "cyber threat" to the US and the world. A Pentagon report last month directly accused the Chinese government and military of large-scale cyber intrusions into American government, military and corporate computer networks. During the summit, Obama provocatively declared that alleged Chinese cyber espionage was the "direct theft of US property."

In reality, as Snowden's exposure of NSA operations confirms, the US military and intelligence apparatus has built up the world's largest and most advanced cyber warfare machine, which it aggressively uses against the American people and any country regarded as a current or potential threat to the interests of American imperialism.

As Beijing has repeatedly alleged, China is a prime target. Snowden presented specific evidence to the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong last week that the NSA had hacked into hundreds of civilian

computers in Hong Kong and China since 2009, including Hong Kong's Internet Exchange, which handles all of the city's web traffic. Having gained access to network backbones, the agency could gather information from hundreds of thousands of computers.

"The primary issue of public importance to Hong Kong and mainland China should be that the NSA is illegally seizing the communications of tens of millions of individuals without any individualised suspicion of wrongdoing. They simply steal everything so they can search for any topics of interest," Snowden warned.

American intelligence expert Matthew Aid provided further confirmation of the NSA's massive cyber operations against China in an article last week in *Foreign Policy*. He revealed that the US has been engaged in large-scale hacking of Chinese computer and telecommunications networks for the past 15 years.

Aid also exposed the existence of a highly secretive unit within the NSA's Signal Intelligence Directorate known as the Office of Tailored Access Operations (TAO). The TAO, he said, employs 1,000 military and civilian hackers, analysts and engineers. Not only has it produced "some of the best and most reliable intelligence" about China, he stated, but it has been tasked with assembling the information needed for the US "to destroy or damage foreign computers and telecommunications systems with a cyber-attack."

These revelations expose the Obama administration's lies that the NSA spying is to protect the US from terrorist attack. The criminality of the American cyber operations against China is rooted in the imperialist character of the entire policy of the "pivot to Asia." The US is determined to use its military might to prevent any challenge from China's economic rise to its dominance in Asia since the end of World War II.

The NSA's massive cyber operations are intimately

bound up with US preparations for war against China. High-level US intelligence sharing with close allies in Asia goes hand in hand with establishing new military basing arrangements with Australia, Singapore and the Philippines, restructuring and reinforcing existing US bases in Japan, South Korea and Guam, and building up anti-ballistic missile systems in the region as part of Washington's nuclear war plans.

The US has encouraged allies such as Japan and the Philippines to take a more assertive stance against China, heightening tensions in maritime disputes in the East China Sea, South China Sea and other regional flashpoints. By elevating the alleged cyber threat posed by China, Washington is preparing the pretext for a provocative cyber attack that risks escalating into a wider conflict. The Obama administration has already claimed the right to launch pre-emptive cyber attacks—as it has already done against Iran's nuclear program.

In the wake of the NSA revelations, the American media and political establishment have launched an all-out campaign to vilify Snowden for exposing the NSA's criminal operations at home and abroad. The latest lie that he might be a double-agent working for the Chinese government is particularly sinister, given the Obama administration's history of targeted assassinations of US citizens.

The fact that Snowden fled to Hong Kong, a Chinese territory, is not evidence that he is a spy, but rather of the collapse of basic legal and democratic norms in the United States and all of its allies in Europe, Asia and around the world. As the illegal NSA spying on US citizens demonstrates, the differences between American "democracy" and the Chinese police state are rapidly narrowing. The class logic is the same. Just as the Chinese government is preoccupied with suppressing social unrest, so the US financial oligarchy regards the American people as a threat to its vast wealth and privileges.

The defence of Edward Snowden is an urgent issue not only for workers in America, but in Asia and internationally. He is being targeted for exposing the extent of the intelligence apparatus that has been established by the US to prosecute war against its international rivals and suppress domestic opposition to its austerity agenda at home.

The drive towards war and dictatorial forms of rule is

rooted in the breakdown of the profit system, which has produced sharpening geo-political tensions between rival capitalist powers and growing opposition and resistance in every country to the relentless assault on the social position of the working class. The defence of democratic rights can be realised only through a unified socialist movement of the international working class to abolish capitalism. This means the building of sections of the International Committee of Fourth International, the world Trotskyist movement, throughout Asia and around the world.



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