

Obama, Cheney and Snowden's revelations

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19 June 2013

It was in November 1973 that President Richard M. Nixon, ensnared in the deepening Watergate scandal, uttered the phrase for which he will always be remembered: "I am not a crook."

Nearly 40 years later, President Barack Obama used a Monday night television interview to give his own variation on the same theme, insisting to the American public that he is not Dick Cheney.

Obama gave the interview largely to counter revelations about crimes far more serious than those committed by Nixon and his co-conspirators. Over the past two weeks, documents leaked by former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden have revealed state surveillance programs carried out behind the backs of the American people and in violation of basic constitutional rights that target millions of people in the US and around the world.

"Some people say, 'Well, you know, Obama was this raving liberal before. Now he's, you know, Dick Cheney,'" Obama said in a PBS interview. "Dick Cheney sometimes says, 'Yeah, you know? He took it all lock, stock and barrel.' My concern has always been not that we shouldn't do intelligence gathering to prevent terrorism, but rather are we setting up a system of checks and balances?"

These "checks and balances"—a secret FISA (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act) court that rubber stamps every request from intelligence agencies—had made the spying programs "transparent," Obama claimed. The only ones in the dark are the millions of Americans being spied upon and having their rights to privacy and free speech shredded by measures traditionally associated with a police state.

If the former candidate of "hope" and "change" fears that he is increasingly perceived among many who voted for him as the reincarnation of Dick Cheney, it is for good reason. The PRISM program exposed by Snowden, in which Yahoo, Google, Microsoft and

other private information technology companies collaborate with the NSA in spying on hundreds of millions, in the US and internationally, is the successor of the Terrorist Surveillance Program (TSP), the warrantless spying operation with which Cheney was identified before a federal court found it unconstitutional and illegal.

The TSP, along with other spying programs, was continued under a new name and with the FISA court's rubber stamp. It was passed on from the Bush to the Obama administration.

Snowden also exposed an NSA program that captures the telephone records of every US resident every day of the year.

Only a day before Obama's interview, Cheney himself appeared on national television to defend his brainchild and vilify Snowden for daring to expose it to the people of the US and the world.

Asked what he thought of the 29-year-old former NSA contractor, Cheney responded: "I think he's a traitor. I think he has committed crimes in effect by violating agreements given the position he had." He added, "And I think it's one of the worst occasions in my memory of somebody with access to classified information doing enormous damage to the national security interests of the United States."

In a question and answer session conducted by the British daily *Guardian*, Snowden gave the appropriate response, noting Cheney's role in implementing illegal spying operations and launching the war in Iraq. "Being called a traitor by Dick Cheney," he said, "is the highest honor you can give an American, and the more panicked talk we hear from people like him, [Democratic Party Senator Dianne] Feinstein, and [Republican Representative Peter] King, the better off we all are. If they had taught a class on how to be the kind of citizen Dick Cheney worries about, I would have finished high school."

Being indicted by Cheney—and by right-wing Democrats like Feinstein or Republicans like King—as a traitor and a criminal should be recognized as a badge of honor.

Cheney by all rights should be sitting in jail. He is able to show his face in public today only because of the systematic efforts of the Obama administration to cover up the crimes for which he and others in the Bush administration are responsible and assure that they enjoy undisturbed immunity.

Among the most hated figures in American political life—his popularity rating stood at 13 percent when he left office—Cheney’s influence stems from his intimate ties to the military and intelligence apparatus, the financial and corporate aristocracy, and the most right-wing elements of the Republican Party.

Cheney was among those most responsible for dragging the American people into the criminal war of aggression in Iraq based upon lies and fabricated intelligence about non-existent weapons of mass destruction and links between Baghdad and Al Qaeda. He fashioned his own intelligence program to produce the phony “evidence” he then used to tell the American public that Iraq posed an imminent threat of nuclear, biological or chemical attack. The results of his crime were the loss of up to a million Iraqi lives and the killing and maiming of thousands of US troops.

Cheney has publicly acknowledged and defended the pivotal role he played in the Bush administration’s going over to what he called “the dark side,” developing a systematic program of torture, extraordinary rendition and detention without charges that produced the horrific crimes of Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and CIA black sites around the world.

The corrupt former CEO of Halliburton personifies a US ruling political establishment that operates as a perpetual criminal conspiracy against the American people and working people all over the planet.

What is most noteworthy, however, is that Cheney’s comments are not some aberration, but rather fully in line with those of senior Democrats and much of the ostensibly liberal media in attacking Snowden as a traitor for making the massive spying operations known to the people of the US and the world.

In his Q&A with the *Guardian*, Snowden voiced the hope that his exposure would give “Obama an opportunity to appeal for a return to sanity,

constitutional policy, and the rule of law rather than men.”

Within hours, Obama made clear in his televised interview that he would do nothing of the sort. Rather, the domestic spying operations and the wholesale violations of the US Constitution that they entail will continue unabated.

Even more than Cheney before him, Obama personifies the consolidation of control over the US state by the military and intelligence apparatus, together with Wall Street’s financial oligarchy. Carrying out policies opposed by the vast majority of the population, including new wars of imperialist aggression, and fearing that social inequality and economic deprivation will produce a revolt from below, these forces are determined to maintain and expand the machinery of a police state dictatorship.

The defense of democratic rights can be waged only through the independent political mobilization of the working class in struggle against capitalism. At the forefront of this movement must be the fight to defend Edward Snowden, as well as Bradley Manning and Julian Assange, against the state’s attempt to exact vengeance for the exposure of its crimes.



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