

Obama assigns intelligence director to form “independent” panel on NSA surveillance

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President Obama on Monday formally assigned Director of National Intelligence James Clapper to form a panel to review National Security Agency (NSA) mass surveillance programs. Obama announced the panel at his press conference on Friday, presenting it as one of a number of steps to “reform” the spying programs exposed by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

The fact that the president has chosen Clapper to hand pick the members of the panel exposes as a fraud his pretense of making the programs more “transparent” and insuring against “abuses.” The panel is part of an effort to placate popular opposition to the wholesale, unconstitutional violation of privacy rights and to further institutionalize police state methods of surveillance of the American people.

In his press conference, Obama defended programs that include the warrantless seizure of the telephone records of all calls made in the US and the collection of virtually all Internet communications. He outright lied, claiming that these and other forms of electronic snooping do not involve eavesdropping on the content of phone calls or emails.

Obama contended that there is nothing wrong with programs that directly and unambiguously violate both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution’s Bill of Rights—which he is sworn to uphold. Rather, Obama said, the problem was a popular misconception, resulting from Snowden’s leaking of secret documents, that these programs were being “abused.”

Under the cover of meaningless measures designed to restore popular “trust” in the spy agencies, Obama made clear that the mass surveillance of the American people as well as people around the world will continue.

In its memo tasking Clapper with the establishment of

the review group, the White House wrote that its purpose would be to “assess whether, in light of advancements in communications technologies, the United States employs its technical collection capabilities in a manner that optimally protects our national security and advances our foreign policy, while appropriately accounting for other policy considerations, such as the risk of unauthorized disclosure and our need to maintain the public trust.”

The memo makes clear that the purpose of the panel is to tighten the surveillance programs and make them even more immune to popular inspection. Its chief task will be to recommend ways of preventing future disclosures such as those made by Snowden. The words “independent” and “outside,” which Obama used to describe the review group at his press conference, are nowhere to be found.

The NSA is already taking dramatic steps to prevent leaks of its illegal operations. Last week, NSA Director Keith Alexander told a cyber security conference in New York that the agency was firing 90 percent of its system administrators, the position that had been held by Snowden while he worked as a contractor at the NSA.

Clapper released a statement confirming the creation of the review group on Monday that makes its anti-democratic character even more explicit. “At the direction of the president,” Clapper wrote, “I am establishing the Director of National Intelligence Review Group on Intelligence and Communications Technologies to examine our global signals-intelligence collection and surveillance capability.”

That Clapper should be named to appoint a panel whose ostensible purpose is to address public concerns about mass spying expresses unbridled cynicism and contempt for the intelligence of the American people.

The director of national intelligence notoriously lied under oath during a Senate hearing in March when asked directly whether NSA programs tracked the communications of millions of Americans. “No sir,” Clapper replied.

After further revelations of pervasive snooping on the population, Clapper admitted to lying to Congress. Not a single prominent Democrat or Republican has called for any sanctions against the top intelligence officer for perjuring himself before Congress and the American people, let alone demand that he be impeached and prosecuted.

The NSA recently claimed that it “touches” only 1.6 percent of internet traffic. This statement is intentionally deceptive. In the US, communications account for only 2.9 percent of traffic, so a 1.6 percent interception rate is sufficient to capture more than half of all communications.

In its article “NSA ‘touches’ more of Internet than Google,” *ars technica* wrote that the NSA “touches” 29.21 petabytes of data per day, processing data at a higher rate than the New York International Internet Exchange, Seattle Internet Exchange, and CoreSite-Any2 Exchange combined. Taken together, the programs mounted by the NSA suck up detailed data on virtually every person on earth who uses a computer or a telephone.

As the *Guardian* wrote in a recent article, “If you emailed a friend, family member or colleague overseas today (or if, from abroad, you emailed someone in the US), chances are that the NSA made a copy of that email and searched it for suspicious information.”



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