

Britain's Independent newspaper defends state spying apparatus

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The publication August 23 by Britain's *Independent* newspaper of an article by its defence correspondent Kim Sengupta reveals the reliance of the UK government on the complicity of the media in concealing its secretive and illegal activity.

The article, "Agencies should not be upset if we reveal that they run a listening-centre in the Middle-East", was written to accompany an "exclusive" in the same edition headlined, "UK's secret Mid-East internet surveillance base is revealed in Edward Snowden leaks".

The article's pedigree and purpose are dubious. It states that the newspaper had been informed that Britain's spying network, the Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ), "runs a secret internet-monitoring station in the Middle East to intercept and process vast quantities of emails, telephone calls and web traffic on behalf of Western intelligence agencies."

The base is part of the £1 billion Tempora operation, run by GCHQ. Written by four journalists, including Sengupta, the article states that the data obtained by the unnamed Middle East base, set up under a warrant from former Labour Party foreign secretary David Miliband, "is then processed for intelligence and passed to GCHQ in Cheltenham and shared with the National Security Agency (NSA) in the United States."

The article emphasised: "The *Independent* is not revealing the precise location of the station, but information on its activities was contained in the leaked documents obtained from the NSA by Edward Snowden."

Later the same day, Glenn Greenwald published an article in the *Guardian* questioning the origins of the *Independent*'s disclosure, specifically their claim that it came from "documents obtained from the NSA by

Edward Snowden."

Greenwald, who has worked closely with former NSA whistle-blower Snowden, reported that Snowden had confirmed to him, "I have never spoken with, worked with, or provided any journalistic materials to the *Independent*."

Snowden added, "It appears that the UK government is now seeking to create an appearance that the *Guardian* and *Washington Post*'s disclosures are harmful, and they are doing so by intentionally leaking harmful information to the *Independent* and attributing it to others. The UK government should explain the reasoning behind this decision to disclose information that, were it released by a private citizen, they would argue is a criminal act."

The *Independent* has a case to answer as to whether it is carrying out dirty work on behalf of the British government and GCHQ in potentially fingering Snowden.

Whether or not there is direct collusion involved, the loyalty of the *Independent* to the state apparatus is clear. It is not only that it takes pains to conceal any real information it may have been provided on the Middle East spy centre. The comment article by Sengupta makes clear that the *Independent* has published its piece with the aim of asserting its own trustworthiness and providing an apologia for mass surveillance and the media's silence on the issue.

Sengupta writes in the most obsequious terms of what he describes as the vital and valuable work of GCHQ. Referring to the *Independent*'s exposure of the UK's Middle Eastern base, he states that although its existence "should not, in itself, be totally surprising. The scale and scope of it may well be, but these are among many details the *Independent* is not printing."

Sengupta then gets down to business. "The trade-off

between freedom of the media and national security is an uncomfortable one for journalists,” he states, “especially when one hears of newspapers having to destroy hard drives containing information from a whistle-blower, Edward Snowden, some of whose revelations, at least, were in the public interest.”

“We must be vigilant against any sign of a creeping police state,” he suggests, before adding in words that could have been written by the Home Office, “But we do have to accept that we face a formidable threat from terrorism, and the reason that we have had [sic] not had a major atrocity since 7/7 [the London 2005 bombings] is due, *to a large part, to the highly professional work of MI5, MI6 and GCHQ*” (emphasis added).

“Looking at the back-to-back terrorist trials taking place in the courts gives us a glimpse of the bloodbaths that could have occurred on the streets of Britain if just some of them had succeeded,” he continues. “A huge amount of the prosecution evidence in these cases come from surveillance—secret videos, intercepted telephone calls.”

Sengupta’s message is that surveillance in the Middle East and the UK is a necessary evil, providing only that excesses are guarded against.

“The corollary of us accepting that the security agencies carry out surveillance is that we should be able to look, at times, at how they do it”, he pleads. “This does not mean that the media has an inherent right to expose secrets that would jeopardise operations, and we have not done so in this case. But it also means that the agencies should not be upset if we reveal that, for instance, they run a listening centre in the Middle East.”

Having grovelled before his master, Sengupta concludes by falsely asserting that almost everyone shares his rotten opinions. “There is always the possibility that the information collected can be misused as it is passed to other Western intelligence agencies,” he writes, “but there are checks against that and it is a risk, it seems, the vast majority of the public are prepared to take in return for protection against the ravages of terrorism.”

Sengupta article is a none-too-subtle warning to his colleagues that the information being made public by Snowden is exposing the nefarious and illegal practises of the spying operations of the major imperialist powers and that such exposures must be prevented

under the imperatives of “national security”.

He is kicking at an open door.

On June 7, the day after the *Guardian* published its first article, based on Snowden’s documents, the UK’s Ministry of Defence moved to censor any further coverage of his revelations. A Defence Advisory Notice System (D-Notice) was issued to the UK’s print and broadcast media, including the BBC, stating, “the intelligence services are concerned that further developments of this same theme may begin to jeopardise both national security and possibly UK personnel” (see “British government moves to censor media coverage of spying operations”).

It is now evident that this move by the government was a mere formality, as they operated with the sure and certain knowledge that the media is ready to play its assigned role as the steadfast defenders of the status quo. There was no need for the government to issue a D-Notice, such is the level of self-censorship already operated by the media.

In the nearly three months since the D-Notice was issued, no national newspaper, outside of the *Guardian*, has even uttered a word of any significance, yet alone further investigated the implications of Snowden’s extraordinary revelations.

Sengupta’s article confirms that Britain’s media, like its counterparts in the US and throughout Europe, functions as a semi-official part of the state apparatus.



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