

Obama defends police state spying

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In a speech at the Justice Department Friday, President Barack Obama issued an unqualified defense of the National Security Agency (NSA) and the US government's police state surveillance of the American people and countless millions around the world.

The address was an exercise in lies and historical falsifications. The fact that such a speech could even be given without provoking a massive outcry and demands for the president's immediate impeachment is an indication of how far the American ruling class and political establishment have gone in the direction of totalitarian rule.

In the course of his 45-minute address, Obama never mentioned the Fourth Amendment, which explicitly bans warrantless and arbitrary "searches and seizures"—precisely what the NSA and other intelligence agencies are doing, and on a scale that could not have been imagined by the Founding Fathers of the American republic.

Instead, the speech was marked by repeated paeans to the military-intelligence apparatus.

"The folks at the NSA are our neighbors, they're our friends and family," Obama said. "Our intelligence community follows the law and is staffed by patriots," he added, declaring that NSA operatives "follow protocols designed to protect the privacy of ordinary people."

Obama endorsed the surveillance programs "not only because I felt that they made us more secure, but also because nothing in the initial review [of the NSA programs] and nothing I have learned since indicated that our intelligence community has sought to violate the law or is cavalier about the civil liberties of their fellow citizens."

In another baldface lie, he said the NSA's collection of records of all telephone calls made by US residents "does not involve the NSA examining the phone records of ordinary Americans." He declared that the NSA "is not abusing authorities to listen to your private phone calls, or read your emails," and "the United States is not spying on ordinary people who don't threaten our national security."

Since former NSA contractor Edward Snowden began releasing information on the activities of the agency last June, one revelation has followed another detailing the seizure of the telephone records, emails, text messages,

contact lists, credit card records and other private information of the entire US population and much of the rest of the world. Reports have emerged of the tracking of license plates and monitoring of letters of ordinary people with no connection to terrorism or any other illegal activity.

The US government has been exposed as the world's biggest hacker, attacking the communications of individuals, governments and businesses all over the world and waging cyber warfare against ostensible friends and foes alike. Programs have been exposed involving the seizure of virtually all electronic communications by tapping into the main arteries of the Internet.

Obama gave a blanket defense of this criminal activity and those who oversee it.

He began his speech by comparing the efforts of the American revolutionaries to track the movements of British troops to the NSA's Big Brother spying on the American people today. He failed to mention that one of the central grievances of the American colonists against British tyranny was the crown's issuance of general warrants allowing occupying troops to break into and search people's homes and seize their private papers. To prevent this abuse from being carried out by the new US government, the founders drafted the Fourth Amendment.

The language of the Amendment is unequivocal. It does not include an exemption on grounds of expediency or "national security" to its ban on arbitrary violations of privacy.

In his speech, Obama proceeded to invoke, yet again, 9/11 and the "war on terror" to justify police state spying on the people. He repeated the discredited myth that the massive spying dragnet is motivated entirely by a desire to protect the American people from terrorist attack. He made no attempt to explain why this supposed struggle against terrorists requires the government to spy on every American and tap the phones of foreign leaders, including nominal US allies.

Nor did he attempt to square the "war on terror" pretext with the reality of US financial and military support for Al Qaeda-linked Islamist terrorists who have served as US proxy forces in wars for regime-change in Libya and Syria.

While unreservedly vouching for his co-conspirators in the leadership of the NSA and other US intelligence agencies—despite their having been caught in repeated lies to Congress and the public—Obama launched into a vicious attack on Snowden. “If any individual who objects to government policy can take it into their own hands to publicly disclose classified information,” he declared, “then we will not be able to keep our people safe, or conduct foreign policy.” He went on to imply that Snowden was guilty of “revealing methods to our adversaries,” i.e., engaging in treason.

Had it not been for Snowden’s courageous and principled decision to expose the police state spying operations, the public would still be in the dark. Everything Obama has done since Snowden’s revelations began—beginning with the official witch-hunt and laying of sedition charges that forced the young whistle-blower to seek asylum in Russia—has been dedicated to limiting the damage to the intelligence agencies and defusing public outrage with phony talk of “reforms” and “transparency.”

His speech Friday was the culmination to date of these efforts. Its essential purpose was to announce a few cosmetic changes to some of the programs in an attempt to legitimize and institutionalize them.

The so-called “reforms” include a temporary requirement that the secret Foreign Intelligence Surveillance (FISA) Court approve the gathering of telephone metadata (in its 34 years of existence, the FISA court has rejected only 11 surveillance requests) and a requirement that searches of the NSA’s telephone record databases be limited to persons who are two degrees of separation from the individuals targeted.

He further proposed that the telephone metadata databases be removed from direct NSA control and stored elsewhere, and that an outside government panel be set up to participate in FISA Court deliberations over certain, undefined matters.

As Obama all but acknowledged, these meaningless changes are driven by public relations considerations, not a desire to limit the power of the NSA. They are necessary, he argued, to “maintain the trust of the American people and people around the world.”

The public will remain in the dark about the secret operations of the NSA and the rubberstamp FISA Court, and all power will remain in the hands of fascistic intelligence bureaucrats, who will continue to lie at will, with the backing of Congress, the courts and the media, knowing that they are immune from prosecution for their crimes against the democratic rights of the people.

What is really driving these police state preparations is the staggering and accelerating growth of social inequality in America. Democracy is incompatible with a social system in

which the richest 1 percent controls 35 percent of the country’s total wealth, the top 20 percent controls 85 percent, and the bottom 40 percent controls 0.2 percent; and where the richest 400 individuals have more wealth than half of all Americans combined.

The Obama administration is, moreover, spearheading a drive, on behalf of the financial-corporate aristocracy, to further impoverish the working class and transfer even more wealth to the very top. On the same day he delivered his speech on the NSA, Obama signed a new bipartisan budget that further slashes social spending while devoting more than 50 percent of funds to the military. Meanwhile, benefits for the long-term unemployed have been terminated and the Democrats and Republicans are preparing to cut another \$9 billion from the food stamp program.

The ruling class and its political representatives are terrified of the prospect of a mass movement of the working class in opposition to the social counterrevolution they are carrying out. They are preparing for the inevitable by building up the police powers of the state for mass repression and dictatorial rule.

As Obama’s speech underscored, for the US ruling elite, the Constitution and its Bill of Rights are virtually dead letters. The preparations for dictatorship are far advanced and the democratic rights of the working class are in grave danger.

Working people must draw the requisite conclusions. To defend their democratic and social rights, they must make the decision to put an end to capitalism. The two—capitalism and democracy—are unalterably opposed. The defense of democratic rights rests with the working class and the development of a mass socialist movement to reorganize society on genuinely democratic and egalitarian lines.



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