

Obama administration officials escalate attack on Snowden and “accomplices”

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In congressional hearings Wednesday, senior US government officials continued their defense of unconstitutional data collection programs and escalated the attack on former National Security Agency contractor and whistleblower Edward Snowden.

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified Wednesday before the Senate Intelligence Committee, denouncing Snowden, saying that the revelations had produced a “perfect storm” resulting in “profound damage.” He added that “terrorists and other allies have gone to school” and said the revelations were “putting the lives of members, or assets of, the intelligence community at risk.”

Clapper’s testimony comes amidst published death threats from military and intelligence officials and a demand from the Obama administration that Snowden plead guilty and return to the United States. The administration has already filed charges against Snowden under the Espionage Act.

Clapper went so far as to demand that “Snowden and his accomplices” return to the NSA any documents they had taken.

According to the *Guardian*, Clapper’s spokesperson was later asked whether Clapper would consider journalists publishing documents from Snowden to be “accomplices.”

The response: “Director Clapper was referring to anyone who is assisting Edward Snowden to further threaten our national security through the unauthorized disclosure of stolen documents related to lawful foreign intelligence collection programs.”

The spokesperson refused to be more specific. However, the language is vague enough to include journalists and even anyone posting information on social media sites or speaking at a public meeting about Snowden’s revelations.

In seeking to tie Snowden to “terrorism,” Clapper was backed up by other administration officials, including CIA Director John Brennan, who said that Al Qaeda only needs only to “pick up the paper or do a Google search on what’s been leaked.”

It is Clapper who should face trial for criminal actions, not Snowden. Clapper is guilty of perjury as part of the effort to coverup the fact that the real target of NSA spying is not “terrorists,” but the American people. In March 2013, Clapper was asked at a Senate hearing, “Does the NSA collect any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans?” His response was “No, sir,” adding that any information collected on Americans was not done “wittingly.”

Clapper’s claim was a lie, as Snowden’s subsequent revelations make clear. The NSA deliberately collects the phone records of virtually every American, allowing US intelligence to construct detailed social and political networks. This is only one of Snowden’s many revelations. He has exposed a police state spying apparatus that seeks access to every communication of individuals around the world.

Throughout the testimony this week, Clapper refused to answer questions about details of the spying programs, deferring these to secret, closed sessions.

Leading Senate Democrats, meanwhile, indicated their opposition to suggestions from the Obama administration that vast databases of telephone records might at some point be transferred from the direct control of the NSA to the control of private telecommunications companies. This proposal is part of an attempt to present a fig-leaf of reform while ensuring that the unconstitutional spying programs continue.

West Virginia Democrat Jay Rockefeller said that he “absolutely opposes contracting out this core

government function,” according to a report in the *Guardian*.

Also on Wednesday, Attorney General Eric Holder addressed the Senate Judiciary Committee, where he defended the NSA’s warrantless collection of telephone metadata. Last week the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board published a report concluding that this program is illegal.

The Obama administration has tasked Holder and Clapper with implementing token reforms to the NSA’s massive spying programs. Both officials praised new measures that will make it easier for telecommunications companies to tell their customers if their data has been requested by the government.

Adding his own voice to the campaign against Snowden and journalists, British Prime Minister David Cameron said on Thursday of those who would publish documents obtained by Snowden: “I would encourage the newspapers that are endlessly dallying in this to think before they act because ... we are in severe danger of making ourselves less safe.”

This echoes the threats from US officials, including Clapper, and similar statements from Australian politicians.



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