US knew of British plans to raid the *Guardian* for Snowden documents

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16 July 2014

Emails obtained by the Associated Press show that top US intelligence officials were well aware of the British government's plans to destroy hard drives containing evidence of massive state spying against the world's population that were held by the *Guardian* newspaper last year. The emails show that US officials not only knew of the plans to destroy the material provided by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden while doing nothing to stop them, but also encouraged and celebrated the police state activities of the British government.

The documents span a period of several days before and after the destruction of the material, beginning with an email dated July 19, 2013 to then-Director of the NSA Keith Alexander, sent by deputy director of the agency Rick Ledgett, entitled "Guardian data being destroyed." One can see Ledgett proclaiming the files' destruction to be "Good news, at least on this front," as Alexander responds a day later, asking for confirmation that the drives had indeed been destroyed. Finally, the current Director of the NSA James R. Clapper replies, saying "Thanks Keith … appreciate the conversation today."

The *Guardian* was one of several media outlets, including the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*, which had reported on the disclosures of former NSA contractor Edward Snowden last summer of a massive spying campaign conducted against the world's population by the US government and other allied governments. Last July, *Guardian* editor-in-chief Alan Rusbridger was contacted by "a very senior government official claiming to represent the views of the [British] prime minister" regarding the Snowden material. "The tone was steely, if cordial, but there was an implicit threat that others within government and Whitehall favoured a far more draconian approach," Rusbridger said of the encounter.

According to the *Guardian* chief, "two GCHQ [Government Communications Headquarters] security experts" oversaw the destruction of the hard drives containing all documents from Snowden, while journalists were forced to use grinders, drills, and other equipment to physically destroy the material. This was despite the *Guardian*'s own insistence that it would publish only a fraction of the NSA's documents it had been given.

At the time, US officials had feigned ignorance of the events, with White House spokesperson Josh Earnest saying that it had been difficult to "evaluate the propriety of what they [the British government] did based on incomplete knowledge of what happened," while also proclaiming it to be "very difficult to imagine a scenario in which that would be appropriate."

What the current collection of emails proves is that either US officials did know of the planned raid on the *Guardian* and did nothing to stop it, or that top officials in the US intelligence community acted to ensure the destruction of evidence documenting a massive breach of the US Constitution. Furthermore, the findings show that in approving of the British government's actions, associated most closely with those of a police state, US officials are fully capable of taking such actions in the United States itself.

The majority of the correspondence is heavily redacted, in most circumstances making it impossible to read any of the messages exchanged by the officials. In other cases, entries are blocked in the subject line so that one cannot see who received or has sent various emails, making unclear the level of involvement US officials had in the actual destruction of the documents.

Justifying the number of redactions in the emails,

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which make it difficult to make out to whom a given message is addressed or what is being discussed, public affairs officials working in tandem with the NSA enclosed a note saying that the release of such documents could cause "exceptionally grave and serious damage to … national security."

Also in justifying the withholding of information from the public, the document claims the NSA's right to personal privacy: "Personal information regarding individuals has also been deleted from the enclosures… This exemption protects from disclosure information that would constitute a clearly unwarranted invasion of personal privacy. In balancing the public interest for the information you request against the privacy interests involved, we have determined that the privacy interests sufficiently satisfy the requirements for the application of the exemption."

Such assertions of virtual immunity from public oversight as well as the supposed "balancing" of the "public interest" with the "privacy interests" of the state amount to justification of dictatorship.

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