

# Journalist James Risen denounces President Obama as the “greatest enemy to press freedom in a generation”

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19 August 2014

In a recent interview published in the *New York Times*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist James Risen accused President Barack Obama of being “the greatest enemy to press freedom in a generation” for his unprecedented crackdown on whistleblowers and reporters seeking to expose government attacks on basic democratic rights.

“It’s hypocritical... A lot of people still think this is some kind of game or signal or spin. They don’t want to believe that Obama wants to crack down on the press and whistleblowers. But he does. He’s the greatest enemy to press freedom in a generation,” the journalist stated at length.

Risen, a Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist for the *New York Times*, has been hounded since 2008 by the US government for a story exposing CIA efforts to sabotage Iranian nuclear programs. He has won awards for his explanatory coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and his exposure of the NSA’s warrantless wiretapping program carried out by then-President Bush.

The statement came in an interview with *Times* columnist Maureen Dowd, who asked Risen to speak about the US government’s witch hunt against him and the prospect of a prison sentence for refusing to identify a confidential source. “I was nervous for a long time, but they’ve been after me for six years so now I try to ignore it,” he said.

The government’s effort to compel James Risen to identify his confidential source is part of a campaign targeting whistleblowers and press freedoms being carried out by the Obama administration. Under Obama, the Justice Department has brought charges under the Espionage Act against seven individuals,

more than all previous presidents combined.

The original story on the CIA’s interference with Tehran’s nuclear program had been released in his 2006 book *State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration*, after the draft article had been buried by the *New York Times* on orders from the US government. Upon the book’s release, US officials sought to prosecute his suspected source, Jeffrey Sterling, naming Risen as a witness and issuing a subpoena to compel him to appear before the court.

Though the original subpoena expired in 2009, the Obama administration renewed the case in 2010 as part of a broader effort to persecute government whistleblowers. Obama has prosecuted more of these than any president in US history. Dowd wrote in her article that a partial motivation for the US government’s persecution of Risen was his Pulitzer-winning exposures of the NSA, whose rampant criminality has only deepened under the Obama administration.

In February the journalist was quoted saying that the choice given him by the US government was “Give up everything I believe in—or go to jail.” The US Supreme Court rejected an appeal seeking to overturn the government’s subpoena in June, leaving Risen with no further legal recourse against the demand that he reveal his source. Risen will be imprisoned if federal prosecutors seek to compel his testimony in the Sterling case and he refuses to comply.

Over the weekend, a petition containing over 100,000 signatures was handed to the US Department of Justice demanding a cessation of its “illegal case” against the journalist.

Besides Risen’s suspected source, those charged

under the Espionage Act by the Obama administration include former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, who revealed the vast expanse of illegal government surveillance; Army Private Bradley (Chelsea) Manning, who leaked information detailing war crimes in Iraq and Afghanistan to WikiLeaks; and former CIA analyst John Kiriakou, who was witch-hunted after detailing the torture of CIA detainees via waterboarding.



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