

Edward Snowden accused of having Russian intelligence ties

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Amid a barrage of anti-Russian hysteria whipped up by the US government and media, a House committee report declassified on Thursday alleges that former NSA contractor and whistleblower Edward Snowden stole information both for his own personal gain as well as for foreign governments, including Russian intelligence agencies with whom he had purportedly been in close contact. This report also comes amid popular demands to the Obama administration that Snowden be pardoned.

According to the highlights, which are themselves heavily redacted, Snowden removed a vast number of documents that were unrelated to electronic surveillance or to any privacy or civil liberties issues. The committee suggests that “if the Russian or Chinese governments have access to this information, American troops will be at a greater risk in any future conflict.” This of course suggests that government officials, including those serving on this committee, are preparing for such a conflict.

A section of the report attempts to lay out evidence that Snowden was not a whistleblower, at least not “under current law.” It states that no evidence was found that Snowden “attempted to communicate concerns about the legality or morality of intelligence activities to any officials, senior or otherwise.”

The report does not offer any legitimate proof of its accusations, and in fact the declassified document could best be described as character assassination of the lowest level. Much of what the committee did was counterpose verbal and written statements made by Snowden with its own records of his work for the NSA and CIA.

For example, the committee states that some of the network drives Snowden searched “belonged to individuals involved in the hiring decision for a job for

which Snowden had applied.” It later suggests that Snowden stole both a test and its answers in order to gain a position within the Tailored Access Operations office (TAO). Of course, neither of these assertions are supported by any evidence that Snowden obtained his position through nefarious means, only that he had access to such information.

The committee further suggests that Snowden lied when he stated that his “breaking point” when he decided to become a whistleblower came in March 2013, after Director of National Intelligence James Clapper gave his congressional testimony. It points out that Snowden had already begun his “unauthorized” mass downloading of information eight months earlier, in July 2012.

The report also claims that Snowden’s statements that he had ethical qualms about working for the CIA are spurious since he never mentioned these concerns during official counseling sessions. “Neither the CIA IG,” the report claims, “nor any other CIA intelligence oversight official or manager has a record of Snowden expressing any concerns.”

This last accusation is particularly outrageous, since the committee spends a considerable amount of space in the report painting Snowden as a “disgruntled employee” who became engaged in “numerous spats” with his supervisors. These “spats” include 2006 and 2008 incidents in which Snowden sought guidance through official channels when he thought he was being treated unfairly by his superiors. It is no wonder that Snowden did not feel comfortable addressing more monumental concerns within the agency itself.

Most egregious is the assertion that Snowden stole information for the purpose of sharing it with Russian intelligence services. One should be reminded that Snowden’s purpose was not to be trapped in Russia for

the last three years, or for the foreseeable future.

The Obama administration took extraordinary measures in 2013 to prevent Snowden from receiving asylum from many nations around the world. It cancelled his passport to prevent him from traveling and even went so far as to ground the airplane of Evo Morales, the president of Bolivia, under suspicion that Snowden could be aboard. In the end, after being trapped for six weeks in the transit zone of Moscow's Sheremetyevo International Airport, Snowden was granted a temporary one-year residency visa by the Russian government. This permit was renewed for three more years in 2014.

The current report was unanimously adopted by the House Personal Select Committee on Intelligence in September. It released a press report at that time making the same attempts to portray Snowden as an unprincipled thief and a problem employee who was only seeking revenge on US intelligence agencies. Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes stated at the time that Snowden is "a traitor who willfully betrayed his colleagues and his country."

House Intelligence Committee ranking member Adam Schiff stated on Thursday that "most of the material that [Snowden] stole had nothing to do with Americans' privacy. Its compromise has been of great value to America's adversaries and those who mean to do America harm."

Schiff and his committee colleagues wrote a letter to President Obama in September urging him not to pardon Snowden. Obama, who has presided over the manhunt for and persecution of Snowden, has no intention of granting any such pardon. He has evaded this question by stating in November that he "can't" pardon Snowden because he "hasn't gone before a court."

The principal aim of both major parties is to use the Snowden affair to further ratchet up Washington's campaign against Russia and to intimidate anyone else with access to evidence of US imperialism's vast illegal surveillance apparatus and other crimes from releasing it to the public.



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