

The WikiLeaks exposures and the CIA's threat to democratic rights

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Speaking at a cybersecurity conference at Boston College Wednesday, FBI Director James Comey said, "there is no such thing as absolute privacy in America." Every activity that Americans engage in, including conversations between spouses and with members of the clergy and attorneys, is within "judicial reach." He declared, "In appropriate circumstances, a judge can compel any one of us to testify in court about those very private communications."

The FBI director did not add, although he could well have, that a judicial order is completely irrelevant to the US military-intelligence apparatus. The US government has far more direct methods than court orders to learn what its citizens are thinking and talking about, through the use of sophisticated cyberweapons. These include the thousands of hacking tools whose existence was made public Tuesday by WikiLeaks, in a data release exposing efforts by the CIA to turn millions of ordinary electronic devices, from cellphones and smart TVs to the computer systems running most cars, into spy weapons.

The FBI director's declaration that there is no right to privacy was greeted with a yawn by the corporate media, which barely reported his comments, and by Democratic and Republican party politicians. This is in keeping with the overall treatment of the WikiLeaks revelations, which has been one of indifference to the threat to democratic rights exposed in the CIA cyberweapons cache.

As far as the media is concerned, anyone who raises concerns about the right to privacy, or other democratic rights, being threatened by the national-security apparatus is an agent of Russia. This position was put most bluntly by the *Washington Post*, in its lead editorial Thursday, headlined, "WikiLeaks does America's enemies a big favor."

The editorial begins with a flat-out, 100 percent defense of the CIA, declaring, "The first thing to say about the archive of cyberhacking tools stolen from the CIA and released by WikiLeaks is that they are not instruments of mass surveillance, but means for spying on individual phones, computers and televisions. There is no evidence they have been used against Americans or otherwise improperly..."

The editorial continues, "It follows that the targets of the hacking methods, and the prime beneficiaries of their release, will be Islamic State terrorists, North Korean bombmakers, Iranian, Chinese and Russian spies, and other U.S. adversaries." The editorial goes on to smear WikiLeaks as a tool of Russia, and denounces "privacy zealots" who "are, in effect, advocating unilateral U.S. disarmament in cyberspace."

In response to such a brazen defense of the CIA, one is tempted to ask, why doesn't the *Washington Post* simply announce that it is a propaganda arm of the U.S. government, tasked with the ideological and political defense of the military-intelligence apparatus? There is not a shred of an independent, critical attitude in this editorial. The newspaper swallows whole the CIA's assurances that its agents are "legally prohibited" from spying on Americans. And it denounces WikiLeaks for acting as real journalists do, collecting information about government misconduct and making it public.

This from a newspaper that, 46 years ago, in conjunction with the *New York Times*, published the Pentagon Papers, over the vehement objections of the Nixon White House and the CIA and military leaders of the day, who raised the same cry of "national security." One can only conclude that if someone brought the equivalent of the Pentagon Papers to the *Post* (or the *Times*) today, the editors would immediately call up the FBI and have the leaker arrested.

The line of the *Post* has been repeated in forms in newspapers and on television. Former director of the CIA and the NSA Michael Hayden has been brought forward on nearly every news program to deliver the official government line. None of the major broadcasters adopt a critical line or seek to interview anyone who supports WikiLeaks and its exposure of CIA crimes.

A concrete demonstration of the relationship between the media and the military-intelligence apparatus is provided by a report posted on the web site of the *New York Times* earlier this week by David Sanger, the newspaper's principal conduit for information that the CIA and Pentagon wish to make public.

Sanger wrote about how he and another *Times* reporter, William Broad, prepared last Sunday's front-page report on US efforts to counter North Korean missile launches, headlined, "Trump Inherits a Secret Cyberwar Against North Korean Missiles," which suggested that the US military had developed methods for causing North Korean missile launches to fail. The main thrust of this article, splashed across the newspaper's front page, was that the countermeasures were insufficient, and more drastic actions were required against the supposed threat of a North Korean nuclear strike against US targets.

In a remarkable paragraph, Sanger describes "the sensitive part of these investigations: telling the government what we had, trying to get official comment (there has been none) and assessing whether any of our revelations could affect continuing operations." He explains, "In the last weeks of the Obama administration, we traveled out to the director of national intelligence's offices," where, Sanger says, it was "important to listen to any concerns they might have about the details we are planning to publish so that we can weigh them with our editors."

In plain English, the *New York Times'* front-page "exclusive" was nothing more than a press release from the military-intelligence apparatus, aimed at spreading fear of North Korean nuclear capabilities in the upper-middle-class readership of the *Times*, and setting the tone for national media coverage of the issue. The political goal was to shape public opinion to support a preemptive US military attack on North Korea, an impoverished country the size of the state of Mississippi.

The significance of the media response to the WikiLeaks revelations is that it demonstrates the complete erosion of democratic consciousness in all the institutions of the American ruling elite. In any serious accounting of the threats to American democracy, the CIA would be in first place: America's own Gestapo, what even President Lyndon Johnson described as a "damned Murder Incorporated" for its brutal methods of assassination and provocation across the Caribbean and Latin America.

There is no greater danger to the democratic rights of the American people than the military-intelligence apparatus of the American government itself, the last line of defense for a crisis-stricken and historically doomed ruling elite.



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