

Big Increases for Intelligence and Pentagon “Black” Programs in 2010

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Continuing along the dark path marked out by his predecessors in the Oval Office, President Barack Obama’s Defense and Intelligence budget for Fiscal Year 2010 will greatly expand the reach of unaccountable agencies—and the corporate grifters whom they serve.

According to [Aviation Week](#), “the Pentagon’s ‘black’ operations, including the intelligence budgets nested inside it, are roughly equal in magnitude to the entire defense budgets of the UK, France or Japan, and 10 per cent of the total.”

Yes, you read that correctly. The “black” or secret portions of the budget are almost as large as the entire defense outlays of America’s allies, hardly slouches when it comes to feeding their own militarist beasts. The U.S. Air Force alone intends to spend approximately \$12 billion on “black” programs in 2010 or 36 percent of its entire research and development budget. Aviation Week reveals:

Black-world procurement remains dominated by the single line item that used to be called “Selected Activities,” resident in the USAF’s “other procurement” section. This year’s number stands just above \$16 billion. In inflation-adjusted terms, that’s 240 per cent more than it was ten years ago.

On the operations side, secret spending has risen 8 per cent over last year, to just over \$15 billion—equivalent to more than a third of Air Force operating costs.

What does it all go for? In simple terms, we don’t know. It is apparent that much if not all of the intelligence community is funded through the black budget: for example, an \$850 million USAF line item is clearly linked to reconnaissance satellites. But even so, the numbers are startling—and get more so year by year. (Bill Sweetman, “Black budget blows by \$50 billion mark,” Aviation Week, May 7, 2009)

How’s that for change! [The Register](#) gives a break down of the numbers for added emphasis:

- 1) Mainstream US armed forces \$490bn-odd
- 2) UK armed forces \$60bn
- 3) Chinese armed forces \$58bn
- 4) French armed forces \$54bn
- 5) “Black” US forces \$50bn+
- 6) Japanese Self-Defence forces \$44bn

While the American government refuses to disclose the CIA or NSA's budget, "both the Agency and other non-military spooks do get money of their own. Some of this is spent on military or quasi-military activities," The Register reports.

Toss in the world-wide deployment of CIA and U.S. Special Operations Command ([USSOCOM](#)) paramilitary operatives hidden among a welter of Special Access Programs (SAPs) classified above top secret and pretty soon we're talking real money!

One such program may have been Dick Cheney's "executive assassination ring" [disclosed](#) by investigative journalist Seymour Hersh during a "Great Conversations" event at the University of Minnesota in March.

And should pesky investigators from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) have the temerity to probe said "executive assassination ring," or other DoD "black" programs well, their Inspector General's had better think again!

According to the whistleblowing security and intelligence website [Cryptome](#), a May 8, 2009 letter from Susan Ragland, GAO Director of Financial Management and Assurance to Diane Watson (D-CA), Chairwoman of the House Committee on Government Management, Organization and Procurement, lays down the law in no uncertain terms to Congress.

Ms. Ragland [wrote](#): "the IG Act authorizes the heads of six agencies to prohibit their respective IGs from carrying out or completing an audit or investigation, or from issuing any subpoena if the head determines that such prohibition is necessary to prevent either the disclosure of certain sensitive information or significant harm to certain national interests."

Neat, isn't it! Under statutory authority granted the Executive Branch by congressional grifters, Congress amended the IG Act "to establish the Department of Defense (DOD) IG and placed the IG under the authority, direction, and control of the Secretary of Defense with respect to audits or investigations or the issuance of subpoenas that require access to certain information."

What information may be withheld from public scrutiny? Ms. Ragland informs us: "Specifically, the Secretary of Defense may prohibit the DOD IG from initiating, carrying out, or completing such audits or investigations or from issuing a subpoena if the Secretary determines that the prohibition is necessary to preserve the national security interests of the United States." (emphasis added)

The same restrictions to the IG Act that apply to the Defense Department are similarly operative for the Departments of the Treasury, Homeland Security, Justice, the U.S. Postal Service (!), the Federal Reserve Board, and the Central Intelligence Agency. Talk about veritable mountains of dirty laundry-and "black" programs-that can be hidden here!

Space-Based Spies

Among the items nestled within the dark arms of Pentagon war planners is a program called "Imagery Satellite Way Ahead," a joint effort between "the Office of the Director of National Intelligence and the Department of Defense designed to revamp the nation's constellation of spy satellites," Congressional Quarterly [reports](#).

As Antifascist Calling revealed in several investigative pieces in [June](#), [October](#) and

[November](#) 2008, America's fleet of military spy satellites are flown by the secretive National Reconnaissance Office ([NRO](#)).

According to the agency's own description, "The NRO is a joint organization engaged in the research and development, acquisition, launch and operation of overhead reconnaissance systems necessary to meet the needs of the Intelligence Community and of the Department of Defense. The NRO conducts other activities as directed by the Secretary of Defense and/or the Director of National Intelligence."

As investigative journalist Tim Shorrock revealed in his essential book, [Spies for Hire](#), some ninety-five percent of NRO employees are contractors working for defense and security firms. Indeed, as Shorrock disclosed, "with an estimated \$8 billion annual budget, the largest in the IC, contractors control about \$7 billion worth of business at the NRO, giving the spy satellite industry the distinction of being the most privatized part of the Intelligence Community."

While the Office's website is short on information, some of the "other activities" alluded to by NRO spooks include the Department of Homeland Security's National Applications Office (NAO).

As I [wrote](#) in October, the NAO will coordinate how domestic law enforcement and "disaster relief" agencies such as FEMA use satellite imagery (IMINT) generated by spy satellites. But based on the available evidence, hard to come by since these programs are classified above top secret, the technological power of these military assets are truly terrifying—and toxic for a democracy.

DHS [describes](#) the National Applications Office as "the executive agent to facilitate the use of intelligence community technological assets for civil, homeland security and law enforcement purposes." As Congressional Quarterly reveals, the "classified plan would include new, redesigned 'electro-optical' satellites, which collect data from across the electromagnetic spectrum, as well as the expanded use of commercial satellite imagery. Although the cost is secret, most estimates place it in the multibillion-dollar range."

How these redesigned assets will be deployed hasn't been announced. The more pertinent issue is whether or not DHS, reputedly a civilian agency but one which answers to the militarized Office of the Director of National Intelligence ([ODNI](#)), will position these assets to illegally spy on Americans. The available evidence is they will.

DHS avers that "homeland security and law enforcement will also benefit from access to Intelligence Community capabilities." With Pentagon "black" programs already costing taxpayers tens of billions of dollars the question remains, with NAO as the "principal interface" between American spooks, DHS bureaucrats and law enforcement, who will oversee NAO's "more robust access to needed remote sensing information to appropriate customers"?

Certainly not Congress. Investigative journalist Siobhan Gorman writing in [The Wall Street Journal](#) documented last year, that despite a highly-critical June 2008 [study](#) by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), Congress partially-funded the program "in a little debated \$634 billion spending measure."

Indeed, a fully-operational NAO now provides federal, state and local officials "with

extensive access to spy-satellite imagery—but no eavesdropping—to assist with emergency response and other domestic-security needs, such as identifying where ports or border areas are vulnerable to terrorism.” But as CRS investigators wrote:

Members of Congress and outside groups have raised concerns that using satellites for law enforcement purposes may infringe on the privacy and Fourth Amendment rights of U.S. persons. Other commentators have questioned whether the proposed surveillance will violate the Posse Comitatus Act or other restrictions on military involvement in civilian law enforcement, or would otherwise exceed the statutory mandates of the agencies involved. (Richard A. Best Jr. and Jennifer K. Elsea, “Satellite Surveillance: Domestic Issues,” Congressional Research Service, June 27, 2008)

While these serious civil liberties’ issues have apparently been swept under the carpet, huge funding outlays by Congress for Pentagon’s “black” budget operations indicate that President Obama’s promises of “change” in how “government does business” is so much hot-air meant to placate the rubes.

Driven by a Corporatist Agenda

Wholesale spying by the American government on its citizens as numerous investigators have uncovered, is aided and abetted by a host of well-heeled corporate grifters in the defense, intelligence and security industries. These powerful, and influential, private players in the Military-Industrial-Security Complex are largely unaccountable; it can be said that America’s intelligence and security needs are driven by firms that benefit directly from the Pentagon’s penchant for secrecy.

Federal Computer Week [reported](#) in April that the program to revamp America’s spy satellites “has the backing of the Obama administration, and the program is expected to win congressional approval, according to a senior intelligence official.”

The same anonymous “senior official” told the publication, “given the backing of the Defense Department, ODNI and the Obama administration, lawmakers are expected to approve the plan.” And as with other “black” programs, the cost is classified but is expected to run into the billions; a veritable windfall for enterprising defense corporations.

The electro-optical satellite modernization program involves building new satellites that the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO) would operate and expanding the use of imagery from commercial providers, according to a statement the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released April 7. Under the plan, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency would continue to integrate imagery products for government customers. (Ben Bain, “Spy satellite tally could increase,” Federal Computer Week, April 8, 2009)

While no decision has been reached on the “acquisition approach for the program,” ODNI and NRO “would oversee the acquisition strategy for the new government-built satellites and a contract would likely be awarded within months.”

In a toss-off statement to justify the enormous outlay of taxpayer dollars for the new initiative, Obama’s Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Blair, said last month, “When it comes to supporting our military forces and the safety of Americans, we cannot afford any

gaps in collection.” Or perhaps “any gaps in collection” on Americans. As Tim Shorrock [revealed](#),

The plans to increase domestic spying are estimated to be worth billions of dollars in new business for the intelligence contractors. The market potential was on display in October at GEOINT 2007, the annual conference sponsored by the U.S. Geospatial Intelligence Foundation (USGIF), a non-profit organization funded by the largest contractors for the NGA. During the conference, which took place in October at the spacious Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center in downtown San Antonio, many companies were displaying spying and surveillance tools that had been used in Afghanistan and Iraq and were now being re-branded for potential domestic use. (“Domestic Spying, Inc.,” CorpWatch, November 27, 2007)

Indeed, according to Shorrock when the NAO program was conceived in 2005, former ODNI director Michael McConnell “turned to Booz Allen Hamilton of McLean, Virginia—one of the largest contractors in the spy business. The company was tasked with studying how intelligence from spy satellites and photoreconnaissance planes could be better used domestically to track potential threats to security within the U.S.”

Tellingly, McConnell was a senior vice president with the spooky firm for a decade. Booz Allen Hamilton was acquired by the private equity firm The Carlyle Group in a 2008 deal worth \$2.54 billion. In addition to Booz Allen Hamilton, other giant defense and security corporations involved in running Homeland Security’s National Applications Office include the scandal-tainted British firm BAE Systems, ManTech, Boeing and L-3 Communications.

Among the firms in the running to land ODNI/NRO new spy satellite contracts are: BAE, Boeing, Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman. All of these corporations according to the Project on Government Oversight’s ([POGO](#)) Federal Contractor Mismanagement Database ([FCMD](#)) have “histories of misconduct such as contract fraud and environmental, ethics, and labor violations.”

Unsurprisingly, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, BAE and Northrop Grumman lead the pack in “total instances of misconduct” as well as fines levied by the federal government for abusive practices and outright fraud.

Conclusion

Unaccountable federal agencies and corporations will continue the capitalist “security” grift, particularly when it comes to “black” programs run by the Department of Defense and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Despite a documented history of serious ethical and constitutional breeches, these programs will persist and expand well into the future. While the Obama administration has said it favors government transparency, it has continued to employ the opaque methods of its predecessors.

From the use of the state secrets privilege to conceal driftnet surveillance of Americans, to its refusal to launch an investigation—and prosecution—of Bush regime torture enablers and war criminals, the “change” administration instead, has delivered “more of the same.”

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