

Denouncing NSA Surveillance Isn't Enough — We Need the Power to Stop It

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For more than a month, outrage has been profuse in response to news about NSA surveillance and other evidence that all three branches of the U.S. government are turning Uncle Sam into Big Brother.

Now what? Continuing to expose and denounce the assaults on civil liberties is essential. So is supporting Bradley Manning, Edward Snowden and other whistleblowers — past, present and future. But those vital efforts are far from sufficient.

For a moment, walk a mile in the iron-heeled shoes of the military-industrial-digital complex. Its leaders don't like clarity about what they're doing, and they certainly don't like being exposed or denounced — but right now the surveillance state is in no danger of losing what it needs to keep going: power.

The huge digi-tech firms and the government have become mutual tools for gaining humungous profits and tightening political control. The partnerships are deeply enmeshed in military and surveillance realms, whether cruise missiles and drones or vast metadata records and capacities to squirrel away trillions of emails.

At the core of the surveillance state is the hollowness of its democratic pretenses. Only with authentic democracy can we save ourselves from devastating evisceration of the First, Fourth and Fifth Amendments.

The enormous corporate leverage over government policies doesn't change the fact that the nexus of the surveillance state — and the only organization with enough potential torque to reverse its anti-democratic trajectory — is government itself.

The necessity is to subdue the corporate-military forces that have so extensively hijacked the government. To do that, we'll need to accomplish what progressives are currently ill-positioned for: democratic mobilization to challenge the surveillance state's hold on power.

These days, progressives are way too deferential and nice to elected Democrats who should be confronted for their active or passive complicity with abysmal policies of the Obama White House. An example is Al Franken, senator from Minnesota, who [declared](#) his support for the NSA surveillance program last month: "I can assure you, this is not about spying on the American people."

The right-wing Tea Party types realized years ago what progressive activists and groups are much less likely to face — that namby-pamby "lobbying" gets much weaker results than

identifying crucial issues and making clear a willingness to mount primary challenges.

Progressives should be turning up the heat and building electoral capacities. But right now, many Democrats in Congress are cakewalking toward re-election in progressive districts where they should be on the defensive for their anemic “opposition” to — or outright support for — NSA surveillance.

Meanwhile, such officials with national profiles should encounter progressive pushback wherever they go. A step in that direction will happen just north of the Golden Gate Bridge this weekend, when House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi appears as guest of honor to raise money for the party (up to \$32,400 per couple) at a Marin County reception. There will also be [a different kind of reception that Pelosi hadn't been counting on](#) — a picket line challenging her steadfast support for NSA surveillance.

In the first days of this week, upwards of 20,000 people responded to a RootsAction.org [action alert](#) by sending their senators and representative an email urging an end to the Insider Threat Program — the creepily Orwellian concoction that, as McClatchy news service revealed last month, “requires federal employees to keep closer tabs on their co-workers and exhorts managers to punish those who fail to report their suspicions.”

Messages to Congress members, vocal protests and many other forms of public outcry are important — but they should lay the groundwork for much stronger actions to wrest control of the government away from the military-industrial-digital complex. That may seem impossible, but it's certainly imperative: if we're going to prevent the destruction of civil liberties. In the long run, denunciations of the surveillance state will mean little unless we can build the political capacity to end it.

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