

Snowden Is a Janitor Working for the Russians

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Last week, the Sunday chat shows featured some of the usual [official vitriol](#) directed at NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

Republican Rep. Mike Rogers led the charge. On Meet the Press ([1/19/14](#)), he said listening to Snowden was like paying attention to “the janitor at a bank who figured out how to steal some money deciding matters of high finance.”

He went on:

ROGERS: Well, let me just say this. I believe there’s a reason he ended up in the hands, the loving arms, of an FSB agent in Moscow. I don’t think that’s a coincidence, No. 1. No. 2, and let me just talk about this. I think it’s important.

GREGORY: You think the Russians helped Ed Snowden?

ROGERS: I believe there’s questions to be answered there. I don’t think it was a gee-whiz luck event that he ended up in Moscow under the handling of the FSB.

GREGORY: That’s a significant development if it’s true.

“If it’s true”—an important qualifier there.

Rogers was also on Face the Nation ([1/19/14](#)), saying the same thing (“I can guarantee you he’s in the loving arms of an FSB agent right today”), still offering no evidence.

But in Newsweek ([1/24/14](#)), Jeff Stein seemed to think these accusations had some bite:

Give the hard-liners credit: After one stunning revelation after another about the National Security Agency’s Orwellian spying operations, they finally managed to land a punch this week on Edward Snowden, the über-leaking fugitive.

And the punch apparently came from Rogers and others:

But this week, renewed accusations of “treason,” along with sharper insinuations from Rogers that the former NSA contractor had to have had “some help,” or was “cultivated by a foreign power to do what he did,” as House Homeland Security Committee chairman Mike McCaul, R-Texas, claimed, seemed to have gained wider support. Even Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who chairs the Senate Intelligence Committee, added her voice to the overheated rhetoric, telling Meet the Press that Snowden “may well have” had help from the Russians. “I don’t know,” she added lamely.

No matter that no one cited any evidence to back up these charges. But backstopped by a blistering cover story in the liberal New Republic portraying Snowden, his reporter pal Glenn Greenwald and WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange as men who “despise the modern liberal state,” the assaults found takers on every major network. Indeed, they emerged like talking points from the war room of a right-wing Washington think tank.

So there’s no evidence yet that any of this is true. But since the charges are repeated everywhere in the media, along with the [old even-the-liberal-New-Republic](#) trick, means that this line of attack is punchy or something. Newsweek’s piece isn’t even all that clear:

But scrapping over whether the whistle-blower was a Russian agent is futile now--and mostly silly, says Oleg Kalugin, an ex-KGB general who spent much of his 32-year career running espionage operations in and against the United States. From what he has seen and heard, Kalugin told Newsweek, Snowden wasn’t a spy.

So there’s no evidence for these charges, Snowden denies them, US intelligence doesn’t seem to think they add up--but this is a potent line of attack on Snowden? It’s a curious take. If lawmakers are making unfounded allegations about a whistleblower, and those allegations are being repeated across the media, one might think the real problem is with a media culture.

At least, that’s how Snowden sees it, according to an interview with the New Yorker’s Jane Mayer ([1/21/14](#)):

“It’s just amazing that these massive media institutions don’t have any sort of editorial position on this. I mean these are pretty serious allegations, you know?” He continued, “The media has a major role to play in American society, and they’re really abdicating their responsibility to hold power to account.”

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