

The Deeper Meaning of Mass Spying in America: Political and Economic Consequences of “The Spy State”

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Introduction

The exposure of the Obama regime’s use of the National Security Agency to secretly spy on the communications of hundreds of millions of US and overseas citizens has provoked world-wide denunciations. In the United States, despite widespread mass media coverage and the opposition of civil liberties organizations, there has not been any mass protest. Congressional leaders from both the Republican and Democratic Parties, as well as top judges, approved of the unprecedented domestic spy program.. Even worse, when the pervasive spy operations were revealed, top Senate and Congressional leaders repeated their endorsement of each and every intrusion into all electronic and written communication involving American citizens. President Obama and his Attorney General Holder openly and forcefully defended the NSA’s the universal spy operations.

The issues raised by this vast secret police apparatus and its penetration into and control over civil society, infringing on the citizens freedom of expression, go far beyond mere ‘violations of privacy’, as raised by many legal experts.

Most civil libertarians focus on the violations of individual rights, constitutional guarantees and the citizen’s privacy rights. These are important legal issues and the critics are right in raising them. However, these constitutional-legal critiques do not go far enough; they fail to raise even more fundamental issues; they avoid basic political questions.

Why has such a massive police-state apparatus and universal spying become so central to the ruling regime? Why has the entire executive, legislative and judicial leadership come out in public for such a blatant repudiation of all constitutional guarantees? Why do elected leaders defend universal political espionage against the citizenry? What kind of politics requires a police state? What kind of long-term, large scale domestic and foreign policies are illegal and unconstitutional as to require the building of a vast network of domestic spies and a hundred billion dollar corporate-state techno-espionage infrastructure in a time of budget ‘austerity’ with the slashing of social programs?

The second set of questions arises from the use of the espionage data. So far most critics have questioned the existence of massive state espionage but have avoided the vital issue of what measures are taken by the spymasters once they target individuals, groups, movements? The essential question is: What reprisals and sanctions follow from the

'information' that is collected, classified and made operational by these massive domestic spy networks? Now that the 'secret' of all-encompassing, state political spying has entered public discussion, the next step should be to reveal the secret operations that follow against those targeted by the spymasters as a 'risk to national security'.

The Politics behind the Police State

The fundamental reason for the conversion of the state into a gigantic spy apparatus is the nature of deeply destructive domestic and foreign policies which the government has so forcefully pursued. The vast expansion of the police state apparatus is not a response to the terror attack of 9/11. The geometrical growth of spies, secret police budgets, and the vast intrusion into all citizen communications coincides with the wars across the globe. The decisions to militarize US global policy requires vast budgetary re-allocation, slashing social spending to fund empire-building; shredding public health and social security to bailout Wall Street. These are policies which greatly enhance profits for bankers and corporations while imposing regressive taxes on wage and salaried workers

Prolonged and extended wars abroad have been funded at the expense of citizens' welfare at home. This policy had led to declining living standards for many tens of millions of citizens and rising dissatisfaction. The potential of social resistance as evidenced by the brief " Occupy Wall Street " movement which was endorsed by over 80% of the population, .The positive response alarmed the state and led to an escalation of police state measures. Mass spying is designed to identify the citizens who oppose both imperial wars and the destruction of domestic welfare; labeling them as 'security threats' is a means of controlling them through the use of arbitrary police powers. The expansion of the President's war powers has been accompanied by the growth and scope of the state spy apparatus: the more the President orders overseas drone attacks, the greater the number of his military interventions, the greater the need for the political elite surrounding the President to increase its policing of citizens in anticipation of a popular backlash. In this context, the policy of mass spying is taken as 'pre-emptive action'. The greater the police state operations, the greater the fear and insecurity among dissident citizens and activists.

The assault on the living standards of working and middle class Americans in order to fund the endless series of wars, and not the so-called 'war on terror', is the reason the state has developed massive cyber warfare against the US citizenry. The issue is not only a question of a violation of individual privacy: it is fundamentally an issue of state infringement of the collective rights of organized citizens to freely engage in public opposition to regressive socio-economic policies and question the empire. The proliferation of permanent bureaucratic institutions, with over a million security 'data collectors', is accompanied by tens of thousands of 'field operators', analysts and inquisitors acting arbitrarily to designate dissident citizens as 'security risks' and imposing reprisals according to the political needs of their ruling political bosses. The police state apparatus has its own rules of self-protection and self-perpetuation; it has its own linkages and may occasionally compete with the Pentagon. The police state links up with and protects the masters of Wall Street and the propagandists of the mass media - even as it (must) spy on them!

The police state is an instrument of the Executive Branch acting as a vehicle for its arbitrary prerogative powers. However on administrative matters, it possesses a degree of 'autonomy' to target dissident behavior. What is clear is the high degree of cohesion, vertical discipline and mutual defense, up and down the hierarchy. The fact that one

whistle-blower, Edward Snowden, emerged from the hundreds of thousands of citizen spies is the exception, the lone whistle blower, which proves the rule: There are fewer defectors to be found among the million-member US spy network than in all the Mafia families in Europe and North America.

The domestic spy apparatus operates with impunity because of its network of powerful domestic and overseas allies. The entire bi-partisan Congressional leadership is privy to and complicit with its operations. Related branches of government, like the Internal Revenue Service, cooperate in providing information and pursuing targeted political groups and individuals. Israel is a key overseas ally of the National Security Agency, as has been documented in the Israeli press (Haaretz, June 8, 2013). Two Israeli high tech firms (Verint and Narus) with ties to the Israeli secret police (MOSSAD), have provided the spy software for the NSA and this, of course, has opened a window for Israeli spying in the US against Americans opposed to the Zionist state. The writer and critic, Steve Lendman points out that Israeli spymasters via their software “front companies” have long had the ability to ‘steal proprietary commercial and industrial data’ with impunity . And because of the power and influence of the Presidents of the 52 Major American Jewish organizations, Justice Department officials have ordered dozens of Israeli espionage cases to be dropped. The tight Israeli ties to the US spy apparatus serves to prevent deeper scrutiny into its operation and political goals – at a very high price in terms of the security of US citizens. In recent years two incidents stand out: Israeli security ‘experts’ were contracted to advise the Pennsylvania Department of Homeland Security in their investigation and ‘Stasi-like’ repression of government critics and environmental activists (compared to ‘al Qaeda terrorists’ by the Israelis) – the discovery of which forced the resignation of OHS Director James Powers in 2010. In 2003, New Jersey governor, Jim McGreevy appointed his lover, an Israeli government operative and former IDF officer, to head that state’s ‘Homeland Security Department and later resigned, denouncing the Israeli, Golan Cipel, for blackmail in late 2004. These examples are a small sample illustrating the depth and scope of Israeli police state tactics intersecting in US domestic repression.

The Political and Economic Consequences of the Spy State

The denunciations of the mass spy operations are a positive step, as far as they go. But equally important is the question of what follows from the act of spying? We now know that hundreds of millions of Americans are being spied on by the state. We know that mass spying is official policy of the Executive and is approved by Congressional leaders. But we have only fragmented information on the repressive measures resulting from the investigations of “suspect individuals”. We can assume that there is a division of labor among data collectors, data analysts and field operatives following up “risky individuals and groups”, based on the internal criteria known only to the secret police. The key spy operatives are those who devise and apply the criteria for designating someone as a “security risk”. Individuals and groups who express critical views of domestic and foreign policy are “a risk”; those who act to protest are a “higher risk”; those who travel to conflict regions are presumed to be in the “highest risk” category, even if they have violated no law. The question of the lawfulness of a citizen’s views and actions does not enter into the spymasters’ equation; nor do any questions regarding the lawfulness of the acts committed by the spies against citizens. The criteria defining a security risk supersede any constitutional considerations and safeguards.

We know from a large number of published cases that lawful critics, illegally spied upon , have subsequently been arrested, tried and jailed – their lives and those of their

friends and family members shattered. We know that hundreds of homes, workplaces and offices of suspects have been raided in 'fishing expeditions'. We know that family members, associates, neighbors, clients, and employers of "suspects" have been interrogated, pressured and intimidated. Above all, we know that tens of millions of law abiding citizens, critical of domestic economic and overseas war policies, have been censored by the very real fear of the massive operations carried out by the police state. In this atmosphere of intimidation, any critical conversation or word spoken in any context or relayed via the media can be interpreted by nameless, faceless spies as a "security threat" - and one's name can enter into the ever growing secret lists of "potential terrorists". The very presence and dimensions of the police state is intimidating. While there are citizens who would claim that the police state is necessary to protect them from terrorists - But how many others feel compelled to embrace their state terrorists just to fend off any suspicion, hoping to stay off the growing lists? How many critical-minded Americans now fear the state and will never voice in public what they whisper at home?

The bigger the secret police, the greater its operations. The more regressive domestic economic policy, the greater the fear and loathing of the political elite.

Even as President Obama and his Democratic and Republican partners boast and bluster about their police state and its effective "security function", the vast majority of Americans are becoming aware that fear instilled at home serves the interest of waging imperial wars abroad; that cowardice in the face of police state threats only encourages further cuts in their living standards. When will they learn that exposing spying is only the beginning of a solution? When will they recognize that ending the police state is essential to dismantling the costly empire and creating a safe, secure and prosperous America ?

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