

The US Terror Scare

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The latest in a long series of US terror scares since the September 11, 2001 attacks has unfolded over the last three days, following a well-worn pattern.

Top officials of the executive branch issue vague and ominous alerts. Congressional leaders, after closed-door briefings by the intelligence agencies, echo the warnings. The media amplifies the alarm uncritically, seeking to stampede the public. Not a single voice is raised to question the claims or essential premises of the scare campaign.

A number of questions are raised by the global travel alert and closure of US diplomatic facilities throughout the Middle East announced on Friday.

First, there is the timing of the measures. They come after nearly two months of nonstop revelations about massive US government spying on the American people, including the collection of both metadata and the content of the telephone conversations and e-mail of virtually every person in the United States.

The Obama administration has been thrown on the defensive by the information made public by former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden, with the assistance of *Guardian* newspaper columnist Glenn Greenwald.

Only two days before the State Department alert, the White House received a rebuff when Russia granted one-year temporary asylum to Snowden. This allowed him to leave the transit zone at Moscow's Sheremetyevo airport and take up residence in Russia, freeing him from the threat of immediate deportation to a US prison cell or torture chamber.

At the same time, opinion polls continue to show that despite the smear campaign by the Obama administration and leaders of both the Democratic and Republican parties, the majority of the American people regard Snowden as a whistle-blower engaged in a principled exposure of US government crimes, not a spy or traitor. A similar majority sees the mass surveillance by the NSA as a threat to democratic rights.

The congressional leaders who trooped to the television talk shows Sunday morning cited the latest terror scare as proof of the value of the NSA surveillance dragnet. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham told CNN, "The NSA program is proving its worth yet again... if you want to gut it, you make us much less safe and you're putting our nation at risk."

Saxby Chambliss, top Republican on the Senate Intelligence Committee, waved the bloody shirt of the 9/11 attacks, telling NBC's "Meet the Press" that "there has been an awful lot of chatter out there...about the planning that's going on, very reminiscent of what we saw pre-9/11." He added, referring to the NSA spying, "If we did not have these programs, then we simply would not be able to listen in on the bad guys."

The US media has played its usual reprehensible role, lining up to uncritically report the government's claims as fact and promote an atmosphere of anxiety. There was not the slightest hint that previous such alerts have proven to be baseless, and no reference to the government's record of lying to the people—from the lies used to justify the invasion of Iraq to the lies from Obama administration officials about NSA spying.

In its account, the *New York Times* alluded to the real political motives behind the government's alarmist warnings. "Some analysts and Congressional officials," it wrote, "suggested Friday that emphasizing a terrorist threat now was a good way to divert attention from the uproar over the NSA's data-collection programs, and if it showed the intercepts uncovered a possible plot, even better."

Obama administration officials have provided no factual substantiation for their claims of a new and imminent terror threat, and they have admitted that no specific targets have been identified. The State Department bulletin issued Friday cited only the "potential" for terrorists to attack tourist areas and subway, rail, air and maritime services, a characterization, while deliberately chilling, so vague as to be meaningless.

This is not to say that terrorist attacks on US government facilities or even American citizens traveling abroad may not take place. US foreign policy, based on the constant threat or use of military violence against those deemed to be adversaries, to say nothing of frequent assassinations by drone-fired missile in a half-dozen countries, combined with support for brutal oil sheikdoms and Israeli repression of the Palestinians, continuously incites retaliation which may take the form of terrorism.

Moreover, there are sections of the American state and intelligence apparatus that would see such attacks as an opportunity for expanding their operations both at home and abroad and accumulating ever-greater resources. The US government has ample means at its disposal to engineer such a provocation.

It is a well-established but little-reported fact that virtually every terrorist attack or attempted attack in the United States from September 11, 2001 to last April's Boston Marathon bombing was carried out by individuals who were either acting in collaboration with US government agents or had been under police/intelligence surveillance.

While the White House and the media point fingers at Yemen-based Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, there has been no reference in the course of the media firestorm to the tacit US alliance with Al Qaeda in the Syrian civil war or the links with radical Islamists in the overthrow and murder of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya.

There have been frequent comments in the American media over the past several months, particularly in the wake of the NSA revelations, that a major new terrorist attack might provide the impetus for a sudden reversal in public hostility to the growing power of the military-intelligence complex. In this view, the United States is "one terrorist attack away from martial law."

The model for this, as in much of the buildup of military-police power in America, is Hitler's Germany. It was the 1933 Reichstag Fire—a supposed terrorist attack on the parliament building by a communist worker—that provided the pretext for Hitler's assumption of dictatorial powers. It was later proven that the attack was organized and directed by the Nazi Gestapo.

There are, of course, significant differences between America in 2013 and Germany in 1933. But the extreme social antagonisms that drove German capitalism to resort to the Nazis to suppress the working class are being reproduced within the United States today. Nowhere in the world is the social gulf between the ruling elite and the vast majority of working people so acute as in America.

Moreover, the national security apparatus is an increasingly independent and assertive factor in American life, with military, police and intelligence operations accounting for nearly 90 percent of the federal government workforce—nearly 3 million people, a figure that rises to 5.5 million when military reservists and military/intelligence/security contractors are included.

It is this combination of mounting social inequality and the growth of militarism and repression that poses such a danger to the democratic rights of the American people. The Obama administration, far from representing a break with its predecessor, has carried the Bush administration's repressive buildup to unprecedented dimensions.

For more than a decade, the so-called war on terror has been used as the overarching pretext for the erection of the infrastructure of a police state, including the Patriot Act, the Department of Homeland Security, the Pentagon's Northern Command, the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, military commissions, indefinite detention, extralegal drone assassinations and pervasive spying on the population.

These preparations are now encountering increasing resistance from working people in the United States and internationally, expressed initially in the popular support for the exposure of US government crimes by Bradley Manning, Julian Assange and Edward Snowden.

The defense of these courageous individuals is an obligation of working people, youth and students in the United States and internationally. The cause of freedom for those targeted by US imperialism for exposing its crimes must become the starting point for an offensive in defense of democratic rights. This movement must be consciously developed as part of a political movement of the American and international working class against capitalism, which is the source of war, social inequality and dictatorship.

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