

# America's Fake Intelligence on Iran: Why Jeffrey Sterling Deserves Support as a CIA Whistleblower

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*No one disputes that Jeffrey Sterling told Senate Intelligence Committee staffers about a CIA operation that had provided flawed nuclear weapon blueprints to Iran in 2000, dubbed Operation Merlin, which Risen's book later exposed and brought to light as dumb and dangerous. (Photo: UCB J-School/flick)*

The trial of former CIA officer Jeffrey Sterling, set to begin in mid-January, is shaping up as a major battle in the U.S. government's siege against whistleblowing. With its use of the Espionage Act to intimidate and prosecute people for leaks in "national security" realms, the Obama administration is determined to keep hiding important facts that the public has a vital right to know.

After fleeting coverage of Sterling's indictment four years ago, news media have done little to illuminate his case—while occasionally reporting on the refusal of New York Times reporter James Risen to testify about whether Sterling was a source for his 2006 book "State of War."

Risen's unwavering stand for the confidentiality of sources is admirable. At the same time, Sterling—who faces 10 felony counts that include seven under the Espionage Act—is no less deserving of support.

Revelations from brave whistleblowers are essential for the informed consent of the governed. With its hostilities, the Obama Justice Department is waging legalistic war on our democratic rights to know substantially more about government actions than official stories. That's why the imminent courtroom clash in the case of *United States of America v. Jeffrey Alexander Sterling* is so important.

Sterling is accused of telling Risen about a CIA operation that had provided flawed nuclear weapon blueprints to Iran in 2000. The charges are unproven.

But no one disputes that Sterling told Senate Intelligence Committee staffers about the CIA action, dubbed Operation Merlin, which Risen's book later exposed and brought to light as dumb and dangerous. While ostensibly aiming to prevent nuclear proliferation, the CIA risked advancing it.

When he informed staff of the Senate oversight committee about Operation Merlin, Sterling was going through channels to be a whistleblower. Presumably he knew that doing so would

anger the CIA hierarchy. A dozen years later, as the government gears up for a courtroom showdown, it's payback time in the security-state corral.

The relentless prosecution of Sterling targets potential whistleblowers with a key implicit message: Do not reveal any "national security" secrets that make the U.S. government look seriously incompetent, vicious, mendacious or dangerous. Don't even think about it.

With so much at stake, [the new petition "Blowing the Whistle on Government Recklessness Is a Public Service, Not a Crime"](#) has gained more than 30,000 signers in recent weeks, urging the government to drop all charges against Sterling. The initial sponsors include ExposeFacts, the Freedom of the Press Foundation, the Government Accountability Project, The Nation, The Progressive / Center for Media and Democracy, Reporters Without Borders and RootsAction.org. (A disclaimer: I work for ExposeFacts and RootsAction.)

Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg has concisely summarized the context of the government's efforts in the Sterling prosecution.

"Sterling's ordeal comes from a strategy to frighten potential whistleblowers, whether he was the source of this leak or not," Ellsberg said in an interview for an [article](#) that journalist Marcy Wheeler and I wrote for The Nation. "The aim is to punish troublemakers with harassment, threats, indictments, years in court and likely prison — even if they've only gone through official channels to register accusations about their superiors and agency. That is, by the way, a practical warning to would-be whistleblowers who would prefer to 'follow the rules.' But in any case, whoever were the actual sources to the press of information about criminal violations of the Fourth Amendment, in the NSA case, or of reckless incompetence, in the CIA case, they did a great public service."

Such a great public service deserves our praise and active support.

*Norman Solomon is co-founder of [RootsAction.org](#) and founding director of the [Institute for Public Accuracy](#). His books include "[War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death](#)" and "[Made Love, Got War: Close Encounters with America's Warfare State](#)".*

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