

CIA caught spying on US Senate

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Over the past several days, it has emerged that the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has been illegally spying on the US Senate Intelligence Committee—the very legislative body that is charged with overseeing and regulating the agency—in flagrant violation of legality and the constitutional separation of powers.

Among the basic conceptions of the revolutionaries who created the American system of government was the conviction that the natural trajectory of government, left unchecked, was toward executive tyranny. To combat this tendency, the Founders designed a system in which state power was divided among separate branches of government. The separate branches, under a system of “checks and balances,” were meant to limit the powers of the other branches. Legislative oversight of federal agencies, including intelligence agencies, is one historical outgrowth of this conception.

The revelations of CIA spying on Congress underscore the fact that America is run by an unelected, unaccountable military/intelligence apparatus. It is this apparatus, in conjunction with the corporate-financial elite, that dictates official policy in Washington, irrespective of which political party is in power.

The outlook of those who run this apparatus is one of utter impunity and contempt for basic democratic principles. In the day-to-day activities of the intelligence agencies—spying, conspiracy, infiltration, subversion, torture, assassination—the limitations imposed by the Constitution, the Bill of Rights and existing law are seen merely as impediments to be evaded or overridden. This contempt for democratic rights is consistent with a political system that as a whole carries out its reactionary foreign and domestic policies over the heads of the population, which overwhelmingly opposes them.

The CIA spying scandal has its origins in a Senate investigation into the CIA system of abductions (“renditions”), secret prisons (“black sites”) and torture dating from the period following September 11, 2001. It goes without saying that these CIA practices were and remain completely illegal, violating both US and international law.

To date, under the Obama administration’s slogan of “looking forwards not backwards,” not one individual involved has been criminally prosecuted or otherwise held accountable. Instead, the Obama administration has threatened to prosecute (and has actually prosecuted) anyone from within the agency who publicly revealed the agency’s activities. The Senate Intelligence Committee has produced, but not publicly released, a 6,300-page report documenting these crimes.

The CIA lied to the Senate Intelligence Committee in an effort to cover up its activities. In September of last year, CIA Director John Brennan, appointed by President Obama, filed a

122-page answer to the committee's report that purported to rebut the committee's findings. This answer was later exposed as a fraud when the Senate committee obtained a document reviewing CIA practices prepared for Brennan's predecessor, Leon Panetta.

While the CIA granted the Senate Intelligence Committee restricted access to certain documents, requiring Senate staff to physically attend a facility set up by the CIA for that purpose, the CIA had attempted to conceal the Panetta document from the investigation. Senator Mark Udall, a member of the committee, said the Panetta document was "consistent with the [Senate] Intelligence Committee's report" and "conflicts with the official CIA response to the committee's report."

Finally, having committed these crimes and then lied about them, the CIA retaliated against the Senate Intelligence Committee staffers who viewed the Panetta document by spying on them and monitoring their computers.

The revelations of executive spying on Congress bring to mind the Watergate scandal of 1972-74, which involved the Nixon administration's illegal attempts to spy on and discredit political opponents. In the wake of that scandal, no less than 43 people were prosecuted, convicted and jailed, while Nixon himself was forced to resign in the face of near-certain impeachment and removal from office by Congress.

A far different response greets the exposure of executive criminality 40 years later. The media has expressed indifference to the story and the episode has thus far generated no significant response from anywhere in the political establishment.

The Senate Intelligence Committee did refer the CIA's actions to the Department of Justice for possible criminal prosecution. The CIA's provocative response was to demand that instead of prosecuting the CIA, the Department of Justice prosecute the Senate staffers for allegedly gaining "unauthorized access" to "classified" material.

In recent weeks, the American political establishment supported an armed coup in Ukraine by a coalition of far-right and fascist forces, recklessly bringing the world to the brink of a nuclear conflict between the United States and Russia. One of the US-backed parties, Svoboda, has called for the summary execution of all "Russian-speaking intellectuals" and all "members of the anti-Ukrainian political parties," while publicly denouncing Jews as enemies of the Ukrainian people. A government that forges such alliances abroad is perfectly capable of developing similar forces at home.

The "military-industrial complex" against which Eisenhower warned in 1961 has massively increased its size and power. In numbers, resources, wealth, connections and influence, the 21st century American military/intelligence/corporate-financial complex dwarfs anything Eisenhower could have imagined. Congress is subservient and impotent before it, and the president functions largely as its public relations representative and functionary.

A major factor in the ever more reckless and aggressive foreign policy of the United States is the unprecedented scale of social inequality within the country and the explosive social conditions that it produces. One motivation behind repeated military interventions is the desire to divert social and political opposition outward. At the same time, the rise of an unimaginably rich oligarchy at one pole of society and ever-greater misery and poverty at the other pole is incompatible with democratic forms of rule.

The American ruling class is terrified above all that a movement will develop in the working class against capitalism. The growing list of police state measures—NSA spying, drone assassinations, internment without trial, renditions—are directed against popular opposition.

US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia recently told an audience in Hawaii that “you are kidding yourself if you think” there will not be mass internment in the United States along the lines of the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War. Doubtless, “classified” lists of “enemies of the state” have already been drawn up. While American political functionaries mouth empty phrases about “freedom and democracy,” their open support for out-and-out fascists in the Ukraine indicates where they really stand. The defense of basic democratic rights necessitates that the military/intelligence complex be permanently broken up and abolished. All of the intelligence agencies must be disbanded, all of their “classified” files must be published, and all of the poison fruit of their illegal spying operations must be destroyed. In order to accomplish these necessary tasks, a confrontation with the capitalist system that has produced this complex cannot be avoided.

The world capitalist crisis has generated untenable levels of social inequality worldwide and in the United States in particular. Social inequality drives the collapse of democracy and the turn towards a police state, together with the bloody and provocative expansion of American militarism abroad. The only means of halting and reversing these processes—which lead inevitably to totalitarianism, mass poverty and world war—is the independent mobilization of the working class on the basis of a socialist program.

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