

FBI director acknowledges use of Surveillance Drones in the US

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FBI Director Robert Mueller acknowledged in Congressional testimony on Wednesday that his agency has used aerial drones for surveillance purposes within the United States. The revelation came in the midst of more efforts to justify the Obama administration's unconstitutional domestic surveillance programs under the banner of the "war on terror."

Though the government has previously admitted to using drones along the US-Mexico border and in isolated instances, Mueller's admission was the first time the FBI publicly acknowledged that it uses remotely piloted aircraft. The disclosure may well have been made in order to pre-empt whistleblower Edward Snowden, who has threatened to make public further details about the government's widespread surveillance programs.

During Mueller's testimony, Republican Senator Chuck Grassley asked, "Does the FBI own or currently use drones and if so for what purpose?"

"Yes, and for surveillance," Mueller replied

"[Drones are] very seldom used and generally used in a particular incident when you need the capability," Mueller claimed in an attempt to downplay the significance of the revelation. Mueller gave no indication as to what these "particular incident(s)" were.

In the course of his testimony, Mueller repeated claims made by the Obama administration and intelligence officials over the past several days aimed at defending the unconstitutional and secret spying programs revealed by Snowden.

Obama himself, speaking in Germany yesterday, repeated talking points delivered by NSA Director Keith Alexander earlier this week. "This is not a situation in which we are rifling through the ordinary emails of German citizens or American citizens or French citizens or anybody else," Obama claimed. "This is not a situation where we simply go into the internet and start searching any way that we want. This is a circumscribed, narrow system, directed at us being able to protect our people and all of it is done with the oversight of the courts."

These are simply lies. What Obama calls a "circumscribed, narrow system" involves the collection of phone records of hundreds of millions of people in the United States and around the world, along with a system that sucks up billions of Internet communications on an ongoing basis.

Obama's statements have been directly contradicted by Snowden, as well as fellow NSA whistleblowers Thomas Drake, William Binney, and J. Kirk Wiebe.

“There is no probable cause,” Drake told the *USA Today* in an interview published last weekend, referring to justifications given by the government to access the content of communications. “There is no indication of any kind of counterterrorism investigation or operation. It’s simply: ‘give us the data.’”

In an effort to justify the programs, Obama and the political establishment as a whole have brought out the standard “war on terror” arguments used for every war and violation of democratic rights over the past decade. On Wednesday, Obama repeated claims that the surveillance programs have prevented over fifty “potential terrorist events” since September 11.

The counter-offensive of the Obama administration is aimed both at undermining widespread opposition to the spying programs, as well as creating the rationale for the arrest, prosecution or assassination of Snowden for “aiding the enemy” by leaking information to the American people.

For the US government, the Constitution and Bill of Rights—including the prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures—are treated as suggestions, useful perhaps under some circumstances, but which can be violated whenever it is deemed necessary by the state. Speaking yesterday in Germany, Obama claimed that “lives have been saved” and that the administration has “struck the appropriate balance” between security and privacy.

The rights guaranteed in the Constitution are not, however, suggestions. The “state of exception” and “balancing” arguments of government officials amount to declaration that the Constitution itself is invalid.

Even if one were to accept that the spying programs had “thwarted 50 attacks,” this would not justify the violation of democratic rights. However, all discussion on how best to strike the “appropriate balance” between “security” and “liberty” is predicated on a basic lie: that the “war on terror” places the American and international public under the constant threat of attack, and that this threat must be countered by setting the foundations of a police state. Such arguments are the hallmark of every authoritarian regime, from Nazi Germany to Pinochet’s Chile.

In fact, the various supposed plots cited by Alexander, Obama and others are described in the vaguest possible terms—post facto justifications for a policy implemented for entirely different reasons.

Moreover, many of the alleged terrorist plots over the past decade—both thwarted and otherwise—had involved individuals who were under close surveillance by the state prior to carrying out attempted attacks. Serious questions remain as to the connections between the security apparatus and the likes of Boston Marathon bomber Tamerlan Tsarnaev, 9/11 hijacker Khalid al-Mihdhar, and suspected Danish newspaper plotter David Headley.

It must be noted as well that the right-wing Islamic groups that have committed terrorist attacks are the product of decades of US imperialist campaigns in the Middle East and Central Asia. More often than not, the American military has utilized the services of such organizations for their own purposes—as was the case in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Claims that the US government is “fighting terrorism” are all the more absurd considering the Obama administration’s recent decision to arm the Syrian opposition, which is

spearheaded by Al-Qaida affiliated groups.

The testimony this week, along with Obama's remarks in Berlin, are part of an intensifying campaign by the entire political establishment and the media, aimed at defending what is an unprecedented assault on the democratic rights of the population of the United States and the entire world.

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