

Obama Chooses Ex-Intelligence Officials for “Panel of Experts” to Review Surveillance Programs

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Reports surfacing Thursday indicated that appointments have been made to President Barack Obama’s promised “high-level group of outside experts,” which will assess the government’s use of “intelligence and communications technologies.”

Two of the panel members are longtime intelligence officials, while the other two have worked as officials in the Obama administration.

Among the intelligence panelists will be recent acting head of the CIA, Michael Morell, and former National Security Council staff member in charge of security, Richard Clarke. The panel will also include Cass Sunstein, former administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs under Obama, and Peter Swire, another current administration official.

Sunstein gained notoriety in 2008 when he advised the government to consider “cognitive infiltration” of dissident political groups. In a 2008 paper titled “Conspiracy Theories,” Sunstein wrote, “Government agents (and their allies) might enter chat rooms, online social networks, or even real-space groups and attempt to undermine percolating conspiracy theories by raising doubts about their factual premises, causal logic or implications for political action.”

In the paper, Sunstein refers to groups that attribute responsibility for terrorist attacks to the US government, or allege government complicity in such attacks, as “extremist groups,” which should be subject to penetration by government agents.

Sunstein has also argued that the speech protections guaranteed by the First Amendment are too broad, calling for a “large-scale reassessment of the appropriate role of the First Amendment.”

Sunstein is married to Samantha Power, a leading exponent of so-called “humanitarian” war, who aggressively promoted US military interventions in the Balkan peninsula and Libya.

Morell is former Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, having retired from the agency in June 2013. He had been in the CIA since the 1980s.

Clarke worked for the State Department under President Ronald Reagan, chaired the Counter-terrorism Security Group under George H. W. Bush and was promoted to chief counter-terrorism advisor of the National Security Council under Bill Clinton. Clarke served as Special Advisor to the President for cybersecurity under George W. Bush until 2003.

Swire served in the Obama administration as part of the National Economic Council in 2009-10, before accepting a position at Georgia Institute of Technology.

Michelle Richardson of the American Civil Liberties Union described the panelists as people who are “deeply enmeshed in the intelligence community” and whose “livelihoods depend on the surveillance superstructure.”

“This group is very closely related to the White House already,” said Mark Rumold of the Electronic Frontier Foundation. “When we go down this road of having executive branch insiders continually placed in charge of reviewing the executive branch, it is more of a fox guarding the henhouse situation.”

The *Guardian* also noted, “The review of US surveillance programs which Barack Obama promised would be conducted by an ‘independent’ and ‘outside’ panel of experts looks set to consist of four Washington insiders with close ties to the security establishment.”

So much for Obama’s “outside” experts.

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