

# Veteran New York Times Reporter: “This Is Most Closed, Control-Freak Administration I’ve Ever Covered”

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Seasoned CBS News Anchor: “Whenever I’m Asked What Is The Most Manipulative And Secretive Administration I’ve Covered, I Always Say It’s The One In Office Now”

American constitutional experts say that Obama is [worse than Nixon](#).

The government has taken to [protecting criminal wrongdoing by attacking whistleblowers](#) ... and any journalists who have the nerve to report on the beans spilled by the whistleblowers. (The government has also repealed long-standing laws against [using propaganda against Americans](#) on U.S. soil, and the government is [manipulating social media](#) – more proof [here](#) and [here](#)).

The Obama administration has [prosecuted more whistleblowers than all other presidents combined](#).

And it goes out of its way to [smear whistleblowers](#), [threaten reporters](#) who discuss whistleblower information and [harass honest analysts](#).

Journalism is not only [being criminalized](#) in America, but investigative reporting is [actually treated like terrorism](#).

The government *admits* that journalists could be [targeted with counter-terrorism laws](#) (and [here](#)). For example, after Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Chris Hedges, journalist Naomi Wolf, Pentagon Papers whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg and others sued the government to enjoin the NDAA’s allowance of the indefinite detention of Americans – the judge asked the government attorneys *5 times* whether journalists like Hedges could be indefinitely detained simply for interviewing and then *writing about* bad guys. The government [refused to promise](#) that journalists like Hedges won’t be thrown in a dungeon for the rest of their lives without any right to talk to a judge

After the government’s spying on the Associated Press made it clear to everyone that [the government is trying to put a chill journalism](#), the senior national-security correspondent for Newsweek [tweeted](#):

Serious idea. Instead of calling it Obama’s war on whistleblowers, let’s just call it what it is: Obama’s war on journalism.

Moreover:

- The Pentagon recently smeared USA Today reporters because they [investigated illegal Pentagon propaganda](#)
- Reporters covering the Occupy protests were [targeted for arrest](#)
- The Bush White House worked hard to smear [CIA officers](#), [bloggers](#) and anyone else who criticized the Iraq war
- In an effort to protect Bank of America from the threatened Wikileaks expose of the bank's wrongdoing, [the Department of Justice told Bank of America](#) to hire a specific hardball-playing law firm to assemble a team to take down WikiLeaks (and see [this](#))

And the American government has been instrumental in locking up journalists in [America](#) (and [here](#)), [Yemen](#) and elsewhere for the crime of embarrassing the U.S. government.

Moreover, while the Obama administration is spying on everyone in the country – it is at the same time the [most secretive](#) administration [ever](#) ([background](#)). That's despite Obama saying he's running [the most transparent administration ever](#).

The Washington Post [reports](#):

With the passage of the Patriot Act after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, [a vast expansion of intelligence agencies and their powers](#), the aggressive exploitation of intrusive digital surveillance capabilities, the excessive classification of public documents and officials' sophisticated control of the news media's access to the workings of government, journalists who cover national security are facing vast and unprecedented challenges in their efforts to hold the government accountable to its citizens. They find that government officials are increasingly fearful of talking to them, and they worry that their communications with sources can be monitored at any time. So what are they doing? Many reporters covering national security and government policy in Washington these days are taking precautions to keep their sources from becoming casualties in [the Obama administration's war on leaks](#). They and their remaining government sources often avoid telephone conversations and e-mail exchanges, arranging furtive one-on-one meetings instead. A few news organizations have even set up separate computer networks and safe rooms for journalists trained in encryption and other ways to thwart surveillance.

"I worry now about calling somebody because the contact can be found out through a check of phone records or e-mails," said veteran national security journalist R. Jeffrey Smith of the Center for Public Integrity, a nonprofit accountability news organization. "It leaves a digital trail that makes it easier for government to monitor those contacts."

"We have to think more about when we use cellphones, when we use e-mail and when we need to meet sources in person," said Michael Oreskes, senior managing editor of the Associated Press. "We need to be more and more aware that government can track our work without talking to our reporters, without letting us know."

These concerns, expressed by numerous journalists I interviewed, are well-founded. Relying on the 1917 Espionage Act, which was rarely invoked before

President Obama took office, this administration has secretly used the phone and e-mail records of government officials and reporters to identify and prosecute government sources for national security stories.

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In addition to ongoing leak investigations, six government employees and two contractors, including fugitive NSA contractor [Edward Snowden](#), have been prosecuted since 2009 under the Espionage Act for providing information to reporters about, among other subjects, the NSA's communications surveillance, the CIA's aggressive interrogation of terrorism suspects and, in the case of Army Pvt. Bradley Manning, diplomatic cables and Iraq and Afghanistan war documents.

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The Obama administration has drawn a dubious distinction between whistleblowing that reveals bureaucratic waste or fraud, and leaks to the news media about unexamined secret government policies and activities; it punishes the latter as espionage.

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Every disclosure to the press of classified information now triggers a leak investigation, said Washington Post national news editor Cameron Barr. "Investigations can be done electronically. They don't need to compel journalists to reveal sources."

The Post's Justice Department reporter, Sari Horwitz, said a Justice official told her that "access to e-mail, phone records and cellphones make it easier to do now."

After the New York Times published [a 2012 story](#) by David E. Sanger about covert cyberattacks by the United States and Israel against Iran's nuclear enrichment facilities, federal prosecutors and the FBI questioned scores of officials throughout the government who were identified in computer analyses of phone, text and e-mail records as having contact with Sanger.

"A memo went out from the chief of staff a year ago to White House employees and the intelligence agencies that told people to freeze and retain any e-mail, and presumably phone logs, of communications with me," Sanger said. As a result, longtime sources no longer talk to him. "They tell me: 'David, I love you, but don't e-mail me. Let's don't chat until this blows over.'"

Sanger, who has worked for the Times in Washington for two decades, said, "This is most closed, control-freak administration I've ever covered."

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A survey of government departments and agencies this summer by the Washington bureau of McClatchy newspapers found that they had wide latitude in defining what kinds of behavior constitute a threat. "Government documents reviewed by McClatchy illustrate how some agencies are using that latitude to pursue unauthorized disclosures of any information, not just classified material," [it reported in June](#). "They also show how millions of federal employees and contractors must watch for 'high-risk persons or behaviors' among co-workers and could face penalties, including criminal charges, for failing to report them. Leaks to the media are equated with espionage."

Steven Aftergood, director of the Project on Government Secrecy at the

Federation of American Scientists, told me that the Insider Threat Program has already “created internal surveillance, heightened a degree of paranoia in government and made people conscious of contacts with the public, advocates and the press.”

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“People think they’re looking at reporters’ records,” Post national security reporter Dana Priest told me. “I’m writing fewer things in e-mail. I’m even afraid to tell officials what I want to talk about because it’s all going into one giant computer.”

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“Whenever I’m asked what is the most manipulative and secretive administration I’ve covered, I always say it’s the one in office now,” Bob Schieffer, CBS News anchor and chief Washington correspondent, told me. “Every administration learns from the previous administration. They become more secretive and put tighter clamps on information. This administration exercises more control than George W. Bush’s did, and his before that.”

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