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USA :

Snowden demonized; Obama affirms spying

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Thirty years after George Orwell's futuristic and predictive novel, "1984," Orwell's 1949 police state prediction is here in full bloom.

Wikipedia's description of "1984" is apt indeed. Readers will forgive my bracketed insertions aimed at bringing Orwell's Oceania to life: "Life in [the United States] the Oceanian province of Airstrip One is a world of perpetual war, pervasive government surveillance, and incessant public [Truman Show] mind control, accomplished with a political system euphemistically named [democracy] English Socialism (Ingsoc), which is administrated by a privileged [Democratic and Republican] Inner Party elite. Yet they too are subordinated to the totalitarian cult of personality of Big Brother, the deified [one percent] Party leader who rules with a philosophy that decries individuality and reason as [advocacy of privacy and civil liberties] thoughtcrimes; thus the people of Oceania are subordinated to a supposed ["national security" state] collective greater good."

Not to belabor the Orwellian analogy, but Washington, D.C., Federal District Court Judge Richard Leon in his Dec. 16, 68-page opinion demanding an end of blanket government surveillance couldn't resist describing as "almost Orwellian" today's national security state. Said Leon, "I cannot imagine a more indiscriminate and arbitrary invasion than this systematic and high-tech collection and retention of personal data on almost every single citizen for the purpose of querying and analyzing it without prior judicial approval."

President Barack Obama's Jan. 17 speech before the Justice Department didn't convince anyone that substantive changes are on the agenda regarding the government's now admitted U.S. and worldwide surveillance of virtually every phone, e-mail, and other public and private communication system.

With the exception of a promise that a handful or so of select, still unnamed heads of state who are deemed to represent "friendly and allied nations," no one, including top government officials around the world, would be exempt from National Security Administration (NSA) spy operations. BIG BROTHER Obama—who has been mercilessly exposed by the ongoing revelations of former NSA contractor Edward Snowden—felt compelled to affirm a previously and rigorously denied truth that every ruling-class leader in the world takes as an article of faith: Spying on everyone is fully justified. How else to keep a privileged tiny minority elite in power while exploiting and oppressing the vast majority?

Spying on one's allies and enemies alike is absolutely necessary to defend the "national security" interests of the ruling rich everywhere. The so-called war on terror is nothing but today's overt pretext to do what has always been done to advance the interests of the few against the many as well as the few against their competing elites everywhere.

Following Obama's defense of the NSA's "robust" spy operations, presidential adviser David Phouffe crudely uttered Obama's basic argument, "There are people out there every day who are plotting. The notion that we would put down a tool that would protect people here in America is hard to fathom."

No data was presented to prove this assertion. Indeed, of the tens if not hundreds of trillions or thousands of trillions (quadrillions) of NSA-intercepted communications, the Obama administration has to date proved incapable of presenting a single example of a successful operation that has prevented an act of terror. Or if I am exaggerating a bit, perhaps it is true that less than a handful of cases have been presented, albeit most refuted by the facts, to justify U.S. spy and surveillance operations against the whole world.

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Within hours of President Obama's speech, the heads of the House and Senate Intelligence Committees—Republican Mike Roger and Democrat Dianne Feinstein—met briefly with Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and then issued a joint statement supporting the government's spy program.

A few days later, these same officials and others asserted that Snowden had acted, or might have acted, in collaboration with Russian and/or Chinese spy agencies in collecting classified government files. A Jan. 20 New York Times article headlined, "Lawmakers Suggest Snowden Link To Russia Before He Leaked Data," went to considerable length to indicate that no confirmation of these charges has been presented. Two days later, The Times reported, "Officials at both the NSA and the FBI have said their investigations have turned up no evidence that Mr. Snowden was aided by others."

Yet the notion that Snowden went far beyond exposing the virtually universal nature of U.S. government surveillance operations was no accident, especially when Snowden's alleged crimes now include releasing critical military secrets to the Russians and Chinese.

"Even if he did not intentionally do so," argued several U.S. spymasters, they remained convinced that Russian and Chinese technology would likely have been employed to retrieve Snowden's files from his five computers. No doubt, upping the ante from Snowden's widely supported opposition to blanket spying on the world to Snowden being a Russian agent is seen by BIG BROTHER as justification for the continuation of all NSA spy programs and the further persecution and prosecution of this courageous whistleblower.

Snowden's response was published in The New Yorker. It's not the smears that mystify me," he said. "It's that outlets report statements that the speakers themselves admit are sheer speculation."

One might wonder, however, just what harmful military secrets so worry Snowden's would-be persecutors. He did, after all, release President Obama's order mandating cyberwar against any target. Perhaps Snowden has new military information on the illegal 10-year U.S.-funded Contra War against Nicaragua, or the U.S.-organized military coups that brought the Shah to power and stole Iran's oil in 1953, or the 1954 U.S.-organized coup that removed President Arbenz in Guatemala, or the U.S.-backed neo-fascist 1973 Pinochet coup in Chile, or the U.S. invasions of Grenada and the Dominican Republic, or the 1.5 million murdered in Iraq based on U.S. intelligence regarding "weapons of mass destruction," or the 4 million murdered in Vietnam based on the manufactured Tonkin Bay incident, or maybe even secret U.S. intelligence regarding who used sarin gas in Syria, or the U.S. deployment of death-squad armies in Afghanistan, or U.S. military actions aimed at the re-colonization of Africa today, or military information on the U.S. drone wars that murdered some 5000 civilians in Pakistan?

But alas, we already know most of these atrocities in some detail. Would Snowden violate any moral principle on earth if he were to expose yet new war crimes committed by the Empire?

Obama's speech did promise to solicit congressional input regarding possible changes, but no one considered that any such changes would be substantial. The president also suggested that the massive trove of everyone's communications might be transferred from government computers to "private hands" or to some other unspecified "independent" agency. Perhaps a few more judges might be consulted before tapping into everyone's personal communications, said the president. He neglected to mention that the previous panels of secret FISA Court judges had approved all NSA spying requests.

In each and every instance, however, whatever constraints Obama suggested would, he insisted, be negated in cases of "emergency" or "national security" concerns—the very mantra that every government employs to lie, cheat, and steal with impunity. Even The New York Times (Jan. 19, 2014) felt compelled to note, "The assurances Mr. Obama offered his critics may be made more nebulous, by exceptions written into any new policies" (emphasis added).

A few weeks earlier, The Times published a lead editorial enumerating the government's blatant violations of

elementary civil liberties while urging the Obama administration to put an end to Snowden's seemingly never-ending and shocking revelations that almost daily undermine its credibility. The Times urged Obama to grant Snowden clemency. With an estimated 1.7 million government spy documents in his possession, the newspaper's editors reasoned, in accord with the Negligence Law maxim, "the risk to be perceived defines the duty to be obeyed," a Snowden who was free, perhaps after having received a mild slap on the wrist, is a lesser threat to ruling-class interests than having to endure countless more exposés of government wrongdoing—crimes would be more accurate.

The deal that The Times envisions would be that Snowden return the government's documents, with a promise that he and others to whom he sent the documents would publish no more, in return for an agreement that he would be free from any government prosecution.

Coming from perhaps the nation's most important newspaper of record, which often expresses the views of important sections of the U.S. ruling class, The Times proposal has stirred considerable controversy. NSA history buffs in these spy matters have countered with the hope or opinion that Snowden, "like all spies before him," would soon tire in his efforts; or perhaps disappear from public view, like other "spies" before him; or become mentally imbalanced due to prolonged isolation and depression; or perhaps, like others before him, become an alcoholic and pass into oblivion with no further damage done.

These are the hopes and dreams of the hard-nosed secret service cloak and dagger elements who daily pursue U.S. capitalism's brutal course with impunity. But few are convinced by this argument, if for no other reason that the magnitude of Snowden's files is unprecedented, his political course is increasingly to the left, and his political development is buttressed by possessing future time bombs can be exploded at will, thus further alienating the vast majority from any notion that the U.S. government represents them. The latest polls indicate that the credibility of the U.S. Congress has reached historic lows, with less than 9 percent indicating confidence in the government's credibility.

Further, no one fully knows who else might have the secret documents in their possession. In a Jan. 18 television interview with Glenn Greenwald, for example, Bill Maher, host of HBO's popular "Real Time" news/comedy show, stated that Greenwald had physical possession of Snowden's 1.7 million document trove. While Greenwald, a staffwriter for the British Guardian newspaper now living in exile in Brazil, stated that the number 1.7 million was an exaggeration, he did not deny that he had possession and indeed was in collaboration with Snowden.

At least some of these documents similarly appear to be in the possession of The New York Times, the Washington Post, the German news magazine Der Spiegel, and others. If this proves to be the case, the U.S. government would have to secure their agreement along with Snowden's.

What was most telling about the Maher-Greenwald interview, however, was their exchange regarding "national security." Here Greenwald boldly asserted two interrelated propositions. First, he insisted that as a journalist, he was as qualified, if not more so, than the U.S. government to determine what constituted a legitimate "national security" issue. Greenwald went further, asserting that in the event he believed that any of the Snowden revelations did endanger the government's "national security" interests, he would self-censor. How he would do was not clear. Greenwald, like Snowden, at best hails from American liberal traditions wherein a semblance of credibility is given to the government's "national security" concerns.

In the case of The New York Times, its assigned Snowden reporters all agree beforehand to submit whatever they propose to publish to the CIA or NSA directly. These professional guardians of what is good or bad for the U.S. ruling class are thus accorded the "right" to keep secret at least some government crimes from public view.

No doubt Chelsea's Manning's 2007 leaking of a 39-minute helicopter cockpit video of "go to" U.S. Baghdad soldiers murdering 11 innocent civilians and a Reuters news reporter, was sufficient to qualify as material that required censorship. Manning is serving 30 years on charges of espionage for exposing this truth.

“Too big to fail,” the ruling class maxim adopted near unanimously by Congress when it bailed out the nation’s thieving banks, insurance companies, and leading corporations to the tune of \$20 trillion, or perhaps \$30 trillion, should also be seen as a necessary “national security” dictum employed to protect the nation’s ruling elite.

Similarly, J.P. Morgan Chase’s \$2.6 billion slap-on-the-wrist fine for looking the other way when Bernard Madoff and his Ponzi scheme associates fleeced investors of qualitatively more than that sum should be added to the list of items in which “national security” interests trump human decency. J.P. Morgan’s fines for violating the law by lying to the government regarding the value of its near worthless mortgage bonds last year totaled a pathetic \$14 billion, with no prison time served. Again, “national security” necessitates that real crimes go virtually unpunished. J.P. Morgan Chase, the names of the merged banking interests of the Morgan and Rockefeller families, literally paid a few pennies or less on the dollar in comparison to their \$4 trillion holdings, not to mention with regard to the money that it is said to have stolen.

Snowden’s latest “crime” is the incredible January 2014 revelation, again via the government’s own documents, that the NSA and its ilk physically installed microchips in hundreds of thousands of computers before they were delivered to the unwary purchasers. Worse still, Snowden’s revelations demonstrated that since 2008 NSA spies installed countless permanent “bugs” in countless computers around the world via a refined radio wave technology that requires no physical contact with the victim’s computer. Zap! And your computer is wired for permanent government perusal!

One couldn’t help but recall President Obama’s visit to China last year when he sought to inform Chinese leaders that the U.S. makes a fundamental distinction between spying to defend its “national security interests” and spying to steal scientific, industrial, economic, or intellectual property secrets. The latter categories, insisted Obama, were off limits, if not morally repugnant to the “democratic principles” that Obama claims to champion. The Chinese were said to have responded that national security and economic security were one and the same—“inseparable. No doubt, Obama’s platitudes aside, no self-respecting American capitalist would disagree.

But that exchange took place in 2013. Snowden’s documents released by Der Spiegel and others in early January 2014 reveal that the NSA knows no such self-restraints. Undoubtedly, the well-trained, and surely “morally” instructed secret NSA radio wave implanters will refrain from using their wondrous technology to gain unfair advantage over their capitalist competitors! We are a nation of laws after all! Everyone knows, for example, that in the stock market “insider trading” is banned! Corporate secrets are therefore safe and sound. It’s just an accident, of course, that a handful of billionaire investors just happen to guess right at the exact moment when stocks rise or fall.

Bloomberg News told the story in a May 11, 2011, article on the subject. “Raj Rajaratnam, the hedge-fund tycoon and Galleon Group LLC co-founder at the center of a U.S. insider-trading crackdown, was found guilty of all 14 counts against him in the largest illegal stock-tipping case in a generation.”

The article reported that billionaire Raj had “engaged in a seven-year conspiracy to trade on inside information from corporate executives, bankers, consultants, traders and directors of public companies including Goldman Sachs Group Inc. (GS)

<<http://www.bloomberg.com/quote/GS:US>> . He gained \$63.8 million, prosecutors said.” One can only wonder if Raj’s friends, the “corporate executives, bankers, consultants, traders and directors of public companies, including Goldman Sachs Group” knew that they were giving their billionaire associate, Raj, illegal information!

The federal prosecutor in the case, U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, told the media that illegal trading on Wall Street was “rampant.” But again, sending this “rampant” crew of thieves to jail is not in the “national security interests” of the U.S. government. It’s sufficient to send a select few to prison for a few years perhaps, only to be quietly pardoned when the departing president exercises his right to “free the rich.” Here, I won’t bother to research the names of those criminals who received a “Get Out Of Jail Free” card from capitalism’s highest elected officials.

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I have always been fascinated by those Star Trek episodes that include Captain James Kirk and Spock fighting courageously against one or another of their infamous enemies, whether they are from the Klingon Empire or from other evil galaxies. But just when the Enterprise hero's predicament seems almost irreversible, someone throws the switch and the hologram reality instantly disappears. Spock and Kirk open a door and return safely to the real world.

In truth, we live in a hologram world of sorts, created by an Evil Empire that justifies its looting of the planet by ever invoking its "national security interests." In this name—"today the war on terror, yesterday the war against the "communist menace"—every conceivable evil is tolerated, if not promoted. Turning off the hologram switch, the false world that the ruling elite creates to justify its minority rule, is a prerequisite to organizing the vast majority to challenge its subordinate status.

Edward Snowden's revelations have gone a long way to lifting the veil of secrecy and foul play that is the norm in capitalist America. He has hastened the time when BIG BROTHER'S rules of engagement—and all forms of ruling-class oppression—are brought to an end forever.

Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and all other courageous whistleblowers deserve our full support, along with all other victims of capitalist injustice. Their contribution to humanity's cause is immense and brings us closer to a time when the "national security" interests of the few give way to the collective interests of all the earth's peoples, who have everything to gain by ridding the planet of capitalist horrors in all their manifestations.