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## ALL THAT'S GIVEN UP IN THE NAME OF SECURITY

By Sibel Edmonds and William Weaver

Two days ago [we](#) made available to the public news that one of our members, Russell Tice, a former NSA Senior Analyst, had been served with a subpoena asking him to appear before a federal grand jury regarding the criminal investigation of recent disclosures which involved NSA warrantless eavesdropping. Our announcement was followed up in both the main and alternative media, and started heated discussions among online activists. We have received e-mails and letters from people who expressed their support and solidarity with Mr. Tice and other patriotic public servants who have chosen to place our nation, its Constitution, its liberty, thus its public's right to know, above their future security, careers and livelihood.

We have also received e-mails from individuals who argued against the public's right to know when it comes to issues such as NSA warrantless eavesdropping or mass collection of citizens' financial and other personal data by various intelligence and defense related agencies. They unite in their argument that any measure to protect us from the terrorists is welcomed and justified. One individual wrote: *"so what if they are listening to our conversations. I have nothing to hide, so I don't mind the government eavesdropping on my phone conversations. Only those engaged in evil deeds would worry about the government placing them under surveillance."* But how far can one let the government go based on this rationale? This issue is well articulated in Federalist, No. 51, "You must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself." How do we oblige our government to control itself?

You may ask how NSA eavesdropping affects you when you have nothing to hide. Let us try to explain why you should worry. Even if, as the government claims, this program is only looking for "terrorist activity," still *all* your conversations have to be processed; have to be linked to other calls and sources of "possible" terrorist activity. All it takes is an innocent phone call to a friend, who has placed a call to a friend or relative, who has legitimate business or personal contacts in a foreign country where there may be "suspected terrorists." You have just become a potential target of government investigation – you may be a terrorist supporter, or even a terrorist. Remember "Six Degrees of Separation" (the theory that anyone on earth can be connected to any other person on the planet through a chain of acquaintances with no more than five intermediaries)? The NSA program can easily mistakenly connect you to a terrorist. Furthermore, since the program is being conducted without judicial oversight and under no recognized process there is nothing to restrict how the information obtained under the program is being used.

But let us take things from the widely shared point of view of the individual quoted above; the view that there is nothing for honest people to fear from warrantless, presidentially-ordered surveillance. What other invasions of rights would such acquiescence to government authority inevitably lead to?

Our government will argue its right to break into your house and search it without warrant based on some tip, intelligence, or information that is considered classified, which you have no right or clearance to know about. It will argue that the search and the secrecy are necessary for reasons of "national security" and within the "inherent powers" of the executive branch, therefore not requiring congressional authorization or judicial oversight.

What is next in the name of national security? Will our government call out to all citizens in particular communities to turn in their weapons to law enforcement agencies? Perhaps it will cite the following reason for such call: "We already know that several Al Qaeda cells reside in the affected communities. Our intelligence agencies have received credible information concerning

these cells' intention to break into Americans' homes to obtain firearms, since they do not want to risk detection by purchasing firearms from the market." Would our compliant citizen quoted above be more than happy to give up his right under the Second Amendment for possible security promised to him by his government? When the agents show up at his door asking for his legally registered Colt, what will he do?

There are those well-meaning "conservative" Americans who have been lead to believe that our nation's security is somehow damaged when an employee of one of our "security" agencies comes forward to shed light on activities by our government that may be illegal, may be unconstitutional, and may be a danger to the nation's security. These Americans have accepted too easily the government's propaganda sold to them shrewdly packaged in a wrapping of fear of terror – that if you expose any government action, however misguided or unconstitutional, then you are jeopardizing our security; you are aiding the terrorists. This quote from Benjamin Franklin sums it up well: "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

What price our imagined security? If we now would allow the NSA to listen in to our most private conversations without objection, then when next the knock comes on our door, or our door is knocked down, in the interest of "national security" what will we say? Will we say "come on in and search me, my house and my family; after all, it is in the interest of 'national security' and we have nothing to hide"? Generations of Americans have fought and died so that we can today enjoy the precious fruits of their struggles – the right to our privacy, the right to our freedom from government intrusion, the right to our freedom of speech, the right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," the right to simply be left alone. Are we to become the generation that loses those freedoms, not only for ourselves, but for the generations that follow? And will it be us who lets it happen because of some misplaced belief that government "oppression" equals "national security"?

Since when did true conservatives agree to surrender their individual rights under the Constitution for the sake of some imagined temporary security? Since when have we become so afraid of some foreign terrorists that we shiver and hide under a blanket of imagined security offered up by those in power who feed on our fears? Since when have we forgotten the messages of the Founding Fathers, who understood so clearly that the greatest danger to our liberties is an oppressive government, not outside foreign forces? We should never fear those who are brave enough to speak out, but we should fear greatly those who would silence them.

We like to believe our nation is one that prizes individual liberty and freedom from authoritarian restraint, the dictates of hierarchy, or governmental limits. Throughout its history our nation's soul has been based on anti-authoritarianism and fear of a large, tyrannical government. Our notion of liberty has been built upon a philosophy of limited government with the highest value placed on preservation of individual rights. Our nation's political thought found its roots in the writings of John Locke, who stressed an insistence on imposing limits on authority, on governmental authority, in order to further individual rights and liberty. No wonder both liberal and republican traditions, although each in its own way and style, pride themselves in their eternal quest for '*limited government*'.

Our entire system of government and its institutions is grounded in an insistence that tyranny be combated and that individual liberty be protected from a potentially tyrannical government. The result is a suspicion of authority and an emphasis on limited government. Samuel Huntington, a well-known conservative Republican, states in *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony*: "The distinctive aspect of the American Creed is its antigovernment character. Opposition to power, and suspicion of government as the most dangerous embodiment of power, are the central themes of American political thought."

After 9/11 our president came out and warned us: "*the terrorists are resolved to change the way of our lives. They hate our freedom and our way of life here.*" Well Mr. President, we have come a

long way since that awful day. Our way of privacy in communicating on the phone and through our computers, our way of detaining and prosecuting people, our way of trusting our records with our librarians, our way of reading and discussing dissent, our way of treating our ally nations, our way of making it from the airport gates to the airplanes...simply, *our way of life*, has surely changed drastically in five years. But, Mr. President, we don't have the terrorists to blame for this. We only have you and our three branches of government to blame.

[Sibel Edmonds](#) is the founder and director of National Security Whistleblowers Coalition ([NSWBC](#)). Ms. Edmonds worked as a language specialist for the FBI. During her work with the bureau, she discovered and reported serious acts of security breaches, cover-ups, and intentional blocking of intelligence that had national security implications. After she reported these acts to FBI management, she was retaliated against by the FBI and ultimately fired in March 2002. Since that time, court proceedings on her case have been blocked by the assertion of "State Secret Privilege"; the Congress of the United States has been gagged and prevented from any discussion of her case through retroactive re-classification by the Department of Justice. Ms. Edmonds is fluent in Turkish, Farsi and Azerbaijani; and has a MA in Public Policy and International Commerce from George Mason University, and a BA in Criminal Justice and Psychology from George Washington University. PEN American Center awarded Ms. Edmonds the 2006 PEN/Newman's Own First Amendment Award.

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