

The detention of David Miranda and the “war on terror”

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The detention and interrogation by UK authorities of David Miranda, the partner of *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald, is a chilling act of political intimidation.

Miranda was detained and questioned for nine hours—the maximum allowed by the relevant section of the British Terrorism Act of 2000. He was denied the right to a lawyer and the right to remain silent. His personal effects were seized and not returned, including his computer, cell phone, camera, and memory sticks with documents leaked by former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden.

“They got me to tell them the passwords for my computer and mobile phone,” Miranda told the *Guardian*. “They said I was obliged to answer all their questions ... They were threatening me all the time and saying I would be put in jail if I didn’t cooperate.”

These are the acts of political gangsters operating outside of all legal restraint. Miranda, a private citizen, was detained, questioned, threatened and had his property confiscated solely because of his relationship to Greenwald and filmmaker Laura Poitras, whom Miranda had been visiting in Berlin. Both Greenwald and Poitras have worked with Snowden to expose secret and illegal spying programs by the United States and its international collaborators, including the British Government Communications Headquarters (GCHQ).

While Miranda was detained in Britain, the central protagonist was the Obama administration, which has led an international campaign of vilification and persecution against Snowden since he first revealed himself in June. On Monday, a White House spokesman said that the US had been given a “heads up” about the British action before it happened, and that US and British intelligence agencies have had extensive discussions.

While the administration claims that it did not ask the British to seize Miranda, a formal request was hardly necessary. The police and spy agencies of the two countries operate on the same wavelength. The Obama administration will no doubt gain access to whatever information was seized from Miranda to assist in its targeting of Snowden and Greenwald, just as the NSA and the GCHQ have exchanged information illegally obtained about their respective citizens.

Scotland Yard defended the actions of the British police, saying that the “examination” was “legally and procedurally sound.”

No one can now claim with a straight face that the apparatus of spying and repression established over the past 13 years is aimed at “terrorists.” The detention of Miranda is not a “misuse” of the UK Terrorism Act. Rather, it demonstrates the essential purpose of this and similar legislation in the US, Britain and around the world: intimidation and repression of political opposition to the reactionary policies of the ruling class. The “war on terror” is a war on the democratic rights of the people.

Snowden has helped to expose a network of spy programs that collect and monitor every phone call and Internet communication. This includes the NSA’s XKeyscore program, which allows analysts to tap into all communications without a warrant—a flagrant violation of the Fourth Amendment to the US Constitution. As the arrest of Miranda demonstrates, the government is carefully following the travel and activity of political opponents and their relatives and associates.

There is a growing and increasingly open attack on press freedom, aimed at intimidating any genuine journalists who seek to reveal the truth to the people. Exposing government crimes is equated with

“espionage” and “aiding the enemy,” as demonstrated by the conviction of US Army Private Bradley Manning for his role in revealing US war atrocities.

The detention of Miranda comes just over a week after Obama’s press conference, in which he expressed the administration’s desire to make the American people more “comfortable” with the police state spying programs. Behind Obama’s honeyed phrases lies a ruthless determination to ensure that these programs continue, and that those who expose them are silenced.

In its attack on political dissent and freedom of the press, the US government has the support of large sections of the media itself. In his Twitter message this weekend that he “can’t wait to write a defense of the drone strike that takes out Julian Assange,” *Time* magazine senior national correspondent Michael Grunwald, a supporter of Obama and the Democratic Party, was only expressing in particularly naked form a sentiment prevalent in the media establishment as a whole.

The corporate-controlled media—including the likes of former *New York Times* executive editor Bill Keller, David Gregory at NBC News and Wolf Blitzer at CNN—hates Snowden, Greenwald, Manning and Assange because they defied the mainstream press, which functions as an arm of the state, to reveal truths to the population of the United States and the world. The US media has participated in the cover-up of government crimes and the victimization of those who have exposed them.

Figures such as Grunwald would do well to recall the prosecution of Nazi propagandists following the Second World War. “In a conspiracy which depends upon fraud as a means,” the US-led prosecution at the Nuremburg tribunal noted, “the salesmen of the conspiratorial group are quite as essential and culpable as the master planners, even though they may not have contributed substantially to the formulation of all the basic strategy, but rather concentrated on making the execution of this strategy possible.”

The detention of Miranda and the statements of Grunwald express both the decay of democracy and the fear that exists within the ruling class. Snowden’s revelations have damaged the credibility of the ruling class and the central ideological justification it has utilized for over a decade—“the war on terror.” These revelations coincide with growing international

opposition to the policies of militarism and social counterrevolution. Unable to convince through persuasion, the corporate and financial elite responds with terror and intimidation.

The defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to any section of the ruling establishment. It must be connected to the mobilization of working people and youth, in the United States and around the world, in a political struggle against capitalism, the source of war, inequality, and the drive toward dictatorship.



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