

Canada's foreign minister calls on Edward Snowden to surrender to US authorities

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Canadian Foreign Minister John Baird has called on US National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden to surrender to US authorities and face prosecution—action that Baird knows full well could result in Snowden being executed for treason.

Baird angrily denounced the man who has exposed the NSA's illegal worldwide spying operations, as well as leaking documents that shed light on the extent to which Canada's own signals intelligence agency—the Communications Security Establishment Canada or CSEC—functions as a partner and arm of the NSA.

"I probably agree with the Obama administration on this one," Baird told the Canadian Press news agency in a year-end interview. "[Snowden's] done significant damage to national security, of the free world."

Rather than seeking asylum in Brazil, continued the Conservative minister, "Snowden should go back to the United States and face the consequences of his actions."

Baird's hostility to Snowden is to be expected. Snowden's exposures have revealed to people around the world how, in the name of the bogus "war on terror," the US and its "Five Eyes" partners (Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand) have established blanket surveillance of the world's electronic communications—spying of a scope and scale that the police states of the last century could not even dream of.

Nevertheless, Baird's comments are revealing. They exemplify the Conservative government's hostility to democratic rights and its authoritarian mindset. The Obama administration has authorized the NSA to systematically violate Americans' constitutional rights. Indeed, two days before Baird lashed out against Snowden, a US federal court judge was forced to admit that the NSA's blanket collection of the metadata of Americans' phone calls, a program exposed by Snowden, constitutes a massive, "almost Orwellian" violation of Americans' constitutionally-protected privacy rights

Yet it is Snowden, the whistleblower responsible for revealing this state criminality to the public, whom Baird demands "face the consequences of his actions"—that is criminal prosecution, incarceration and a potential death sentence.

Baird went on to ridicule a statement from the Brazilian

chapter of Amnesty International suggesting that Snowden should be recognized as a political refugee. The statement pointed both to the service Snowden has rendered to the people of the world by exposing "the remarkably invasive extent" of US surveillance and to "US statements labeling Snowden a 'traitor' [that] are prejudicial to his right to seek asylum and to his right to a fair trial."

"The United States," countered Baird "has a free and fair justice system."

Canada's Conservative government, it should be recalled, was also keen to endorse the US's adherence to democratic judicial principles when it came to Omar Khadr, the Canadian-born child-soldier whom the US tortured and illegally detained at Guantanamo Bay for a decade, then had a kangaroo-court style military tribunal find guilty of war crimes.

Baird's attack on Snowden is part of a growing and increasingly strident campaign being mounted by the Canadian government and sections of the media to discredit and defame the NSA whistleblower and counter the impact of his exposures.

Earlier this month, CSEC Commissioner Jean-Pierre Plouffe, the government official ostensibly responsible for ensuring that Canada's eavesdropping agency does not spy on Canadians, deplored Snowden's revelations saying they were leading to a lot of "misinformation." When Plouffe testified before the Senate Committee on National Security and Defence, senators wanted to know what measures were in place to prevent a Snowden-like "nightmare" in Canada, an issue that Plouffe had to say was not within his mandate. The *Globe and Mail's* Konrad Yakabuski wrote a column last week decrying the "hysteria flowing" from Snowden's leaks and denouncing him for seeking temporary refuge from US attempts to capture him—which included forcing down the Bolivian president's plane—in Putin's Russia.

Fueling these denunciations is the ruling elite's anger and fear at the lifting of the shroud of secrecy with which they envelope the "national security" apparatus, so as to obscure its function as an instrument for asserting and defending the predatory interests of the capitalist elite against foreign rivals and political opposition, above all from the working class.

Snowden has shown that the NSA spies on everyone—foreign

governments and their leaders, including such staunch US allies as German Chancellor Angela Merkel, foreign political movements and corporations, UN relief agencies, and the American people. As Snowden said in an open letter he sent to the Brazilian government last week, the NSA operates “programs of dragnet mass surveillance that put entire populations under an all-seeing eye and save copies forever. These programs were never about terrorism: they’re about economic spying, social control, and diplomatic manipulation. They’re about power.”

Documents leaked by Snowden have shown that CSEC:

- *spied on the Brazilian Ministry of Mines (Brazil is both the site of significant Canadian foreign investment and an important competitor to Canada’s mining and oil industries);

- *assisted the NSA in spying on leaders and delegations attending a meeting of the G-20 in London in 2009 and the follow up G-20 summit in Toronto in June 2010;

- *set up spy operations on the NSA’s behalf in 20 countries;

- *helped the NSA to secure control of an International Organization for Standardization initiative to standardize encryption, thereby allowing the US agency to build in a “backdoor” so it could secretly decrypt data that millions regarded as safe

According to Glenn Greenwald, the journalist who has worked most closely with Snowden, many further revelations concerning CSEC’s partnership with the NSA are to come. “There’s a lot of other documents about Canadians spying on ordinary citizens, on allied governments, on the world, and their co-operation with the United States government,” Greenwald told the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation in October. “I think,” continued Greenwald, “most Canadian citizens will find (this) quite surprising, if not shocking, because it’s all done in secret and Canadians are not aware of it.”

Indeed, prior to last June, when the first of Snowden’s revelations were published and when the *Globe and Mail* reported that CSEC has been systematically spying on the metadata of Canadians’ electronic communications (telephone calls, e-mails, texts, internet use, etc.), few Canadians had even heard of CSEC; let alone knew that it was among the NSA’s closest partners.

The term partner, it warrants emphasizing, hardly does justice to the intimate working relationship between the NSA and CSEC. They are in permanent communication, share programs, exchange personnel and CSEC frequently acts on the NSA’s behalf. Moreover, CSEC, according to a memo leaked by Snowden, is eager to expand the partnership.

Given all this, the only politically logical inference is that everything or almost everything that the NSA is doing, CSEC is also doing, only with a smaller global footprint.

Already it has been established that CSEC has been mining the metadata of Canadians’ communications since 2004. Moreover, under the Chretien Liberal government’s Anti-

Terrorism Act of 2001, CSEC’s mandate was expanded to authorize it to spy on Canadians’ communications if focusing on a purported foreign threat.

The Conservative government has responded to the exposure of CSEC’s activities with stonewalling and brazen lying.

Thus Conservative ministers have repeatedly asserted that CSEC is legally barred from spying on Canadians.

This is at least a three-fold lie. As mentioned above, CSEC was given authorization to spy on Canadians when investigating foreign threats in 2001. Second, it is mandated to assist the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Canadian Security Intelligence Service in investigating “national security” threats—threats which these agencies have a long history of defining as any form of leftwing or anti-corporate dissidence. Third, for almost a decade CSEC has been collecting the metadata of Canadians’ communications, information that can be readily used to develop detailed profiles of individuals and groups, by revealing their workplaces, sources of information, friends and associates.

In maintaining that metadata collection doesn’t constitute a violation of Canadians’ basic rights, the government is basing itself on a secret ministerial authorization, never seen by anyone outside a tiny cabal of government officials.

In arrogating this power to spy on Canadians and otherwise covering up CSEC’s activities—above all its reactionary partnership with the NSA—Stephen Harper’s Conservative government is depending upon a pliant corporate media and opposition. The Official Opposition, the trade union-based New Democratic Party has steadfastly refused to raise the issue of CSEC’s anti-democratic activities, confining itself to a handful of questions in parliament over the past seven months. This party—which is trying to convince the Canadian elite that it can be trusted to serve as its left party of government, providing it a “progressive” face for austerity and war—is, it should be noted, a fan of Obama’s Democratic Party administration: a government that has ruthlessly upheld the interest of the US financial aristocracy, including expanding the police state measures of his predecessor, George W. Bush.



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