

Who watches the watchers essay

[Business, Management](#)



The First Amendment of United States Constitution states “ Congress shall make no law abridging (limiting) the freedom of speech, or of the press”(“ Lincoln”). Freedom of Speech will remain liberated for every American to speak freely without any restraint or fear of government.

In August 2013, James Risen a reporter at NY times was ordered to be a witness in criminal trial of former CIA official Jeffrey Sterling, who was prosecuted under Espionage Act of 1917 for leak of classified details to James Risen which were published in his book ‘ State of War’. The United States Courts of Appeals held that James Risen will not be given privilege of First Amendment to get immunity from being forced to testify. This has resulted in court ruling for Risen to identify his source (Guardian, 2013).

With applicability of this ruling in Virginia and Maryland, home of CIA and NSA - the states in which journalism on national security hold precedence. Think of a situation where a journalist can no more guarantee their source ‘ confidentiality’ for supplying information which has high public interest priority. If Risen refuses to name his source and co-operate with authorities, he will be sent behind bars. Media is being choked for performing their obligatory duty and Journalism has been criminalized (Guardian, 2013).

This all started in May 2013, when Federal investigators seized phone records of editors and reporters of The Associated Press in secret. The news organization called it “ serious interference with A. P.’s constitutional rights to gather and report the news” (nytimes, 2013). The Associated Press was informed by the Justice Department about officials from law enforcement obtaining records of Journalists and Office phone lines, including the cell phones and home phone lines. The A. P. was informed that records were

seized in early 2013 without any notice, but they were not informed the reason behind this seize. But, the targeted journalist and timing are strong suggestions that seize is related to a ongoing investigation of information leak about last year's disruption by CIA of a terrorist plot in Yemen for Airliner bombing (nytimes, 2013).

Disclosure on Yemen plot started In May 7, 2012, with an article in Associated Press which broke the news of the thwarted bombing plot, the organization held off publication for several days due to request from White House as some intelligence operations remained to unfold. This development was another addition to the collision between federal investigators and news organizations on government attempts for preventing national security information disclosure. With Obama administration applying their aggressive policy to rein all leaks, this news turned out to be wrong time to pull the trigger. Under Obama administration, six former and current government officials are being prosecuted in cases related to leak of classified information (nytimes, 2013).

In his 2008 campaign, Obama criticized Bush administration's " excessive secrecy". With his election to the Oval office he promised his government will be unprecedentedly open. By 21 January 2009, end of his first day as President he issued government agencies directives to fasten their response rate to requests of Freedom of Information Act and establishing websites for " Open Government Initiative" which serve all required information on their actions and data collected by them (cpj. org, 2013).

These attacks on Journalism are nothing new - Bush administration had launched initiatives to target journalists for squeeze out their government

sources, but latest actions unexplainable. The reason for Obama's election was for barring these appalling abuses by Bush administration of executive power. Rather, Obama has raised the stakes; the only question that remains to be answered now is Who Watches the Watchers?

References

"FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND FREEDOM OF PRESS". Retrieved from.

<http://www.lincoln.edu/criminaljustice/hr/Speech.htm>

Bever, L. (8/10/2013). "James Risen's risk of prison means journalism is being criminalised". Retrieved from. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/aug/10/james-risen-prison-journalism-criminalised>

Savage, C. (5/13/2013). "Phone Records of Journalists Seized by U. S.". Retrieved from. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/14/us/phone-records-of-journalists-of-the-associated-press-seized-by-us.html?_r=0

Downie, L. J. (10/10/2013). "Leak investigations and surveillance in post-9/11 America". Retrieved from. <http://cpj.org/reports/2013/10/obama-and-the-press-us-leaks-surveillance-post-911.php>

Cohen, B. (5/14/2013). "Obama Administration's Spying on Journalists is a Disgrace". Retrieved from. <http://thedailybanter.com/2013/05/obama-administrations-spying-on-journalists-is-a-disgrace/>