



Written by [C. Mitchell Shaw](#) on January 11, 2017

Trump Picks Surveillance Hawks to Head Intel Posts

Donald Trump ran for president on the promise to “Make America Great Again!” He ran as an outsider — a political underdog — who was as fed up with the government status quo as those whose votes he courted. While there is room for cautious optimism that on issues such as stopping the globalist free-trade agenda his promise will be kept, when it comes to the issue of balancing individual liberty and national security, President-elect Trump is filling top intelligence posts with the same surveillance hawks who have built their careers by building the surveillance state.



Last week, Trump named former Senator Dan Coats (R-Ind.; shown, left) to lead the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI). Before retiring from Congress last year, Coats served on the Senate Intelligence Committee. He is also an unapologetic surveillance hawk who wrote an op-ed piece for the *Wall Street Journal* condemning Ed Snowden and defending the surveillance state.

The senator’s op-ed piece, dated June 17, 2013 — one week after Snowden revealed the size and scope of the surveillance state’s unconstitutional and illegal domestic spying activities — was titled “To My Congressional Colleagues: Stop the NSA Grandstanding” and carried the subtitle, “Members have had ample opportunity to learn about these valuable programs.” As many in Congress were expressing their disagreement with the warrantless surveillance which Snowden had revealed, Coats wrote:

Last week, Edward Snowden, a National Security Agency contractor, attempted to make a political point by leaking several documents that have seriously harmed America’s ability to identify and respond to terrorist threats. As damaging as Mr. Snowden’s disclosures are to public safety, I am also troubled by the decision of several members of Congress to mischaracterize this leak to advance their personal and political agendas.

Not only did Coats write that he considered the NSA’s programs of vacuuming up all e-mails, phone calls, text messages, browsing histories, and other personal data of all Americans to be “valuable,” he went on to write that they were “legal, constitutional and used under the strict oversight of all three branches of government.” Of course, nearly everyone now knows that was not true. The courts have since curtailed at least some of the surveillance programs Coats so enthusiastically defended.

Coats also wrote in his *Wall Street Journal* piece that “the Obama administration” had “made the reaction to Mr. Snowden’s leak far worse” by statements which “fueled people’s distrust of government.” The reader who walks away from Coats’ article with the impression that the NSA spying on ordinary citizens’ every communication is perfectly acceptable and should not create a sense of “distrust of government” can easily be forgiven. Because that is exactly the impression Coats intended.

Lest it appear that Coats’ *Wall Street Journal* piece was the knee-jerk reaction of a man who may later have thought better of his anti-privacy tirade, he wrote another piece for *USA Today* almost a year and



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half later. In that piece, titled “Don’t take away anti-terror tools,” Coats wrote:

Following the 9/11 attacks, the American people demanded that the intelligence community have the capability to “connect the dots” and prevent terrorist attacks. Enacting major changes that diminish the very counterterrorism tools recommended by the 9/11 Commission will make our country less safe and more vulnerable.

Defending the bulk collection of phone records as part of “the call-records program,” he wrote:

The executive branch, Congress and courts agree that bulk collection of phone records is constitutional and operated with strict oversight. Despite contrary claims, the government is barred from indiscriminately listening to our phone calls. There is no evidence to support accusations of abuse or unlawful spying on Americans.

And — while giving lip service to “privacy protections and public transparency,” he argued that those American principles should be subservient to the “government’s interest” in fighting terrorism:

Currently, Americans and Europeans are joining the Islamic State, the wealthiest and most brutal terrorist group in history. By exploiting the passports of Western members, ISIL-trained operatives can come to our shores far more easily than the 9/11 hijackers.

The government’s interest is the most compelling imaginable: To the best of our ability, never again allow an attack on our homeland that costs innocent lives.

Coats not only believes and argues that the “interest of government” in fighting terrorism is served by spying on all American (to ferret them out before they join the Islamic State), he has also defended the use of torture in places such as Guantanamo Bay, which he says should be kept open [despite evidence that intelligence gathering at the prison famous for torture is “ineffective.”](#)

It is troubling that Trump would even consider a man with so lopsided a view of personal privacy and liberty to head the ODNI. Troubling, but perhaps not surprising.

Last year, when the FBI was attempting to [force Apple to compromise the privacy afforded by the encryption built in to the iOS platform](#) so that the agency could gain access to the phone of San Bernardino shooter, Syed Farook, [Trump called for a boycott of Apple](#) “until such time as they give that security number.” Trump’s statement shows that he has neither an understanding of nor any respect for the way encryption works to defend the privacy of those who use it.

On the issue of torture and Guantanamo Bay, Trump is also out of step with the American principle and in lock step with Coats. [In an interview with George Stephanopoulos in November 2015](#), Trump said he “would absolutely bring back interrogation and strong interrogation,” including [waterboarding](#). “You know, they don’t use waterboarding over there; they use chopping off people’s heads,” he said. “I would bring it back. I think waterboarding is peanuts compared to what they’d do to us.”

If President-elect Trump *really* wants to “Make America Great Again,” mass surveillance and torture are not the way to go about it. Those programs are part of what is wrong in America and are out of sync with the American principles found in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution.

If confirmed, Coats will find himself in good company with Trump’s national security advisor, General Michael Flynn (shown above, center) and his pick for CIA director, Representative Mike Pompeo (R-Kan.; shown above, right). Flynn [stated in 2014](#) that Snowden’s revelations have put American lives in danger. That is mild compared to Pompeo’s call last year on C-SPAN for Snowden to be “given a death sentence for having put friends of mine, friends of yours, in the military today, at enormous risk



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because of the information he stole and then released to foreign powers.” To be fair, Pompeo did say that Snowden should be given “due process” before being executed. While more than a million have signed the [petition asking President Obama to pardon Snowden](#) before he leaves office, Pompeo [signed his name to a unanimous letter from the members of the House Intelligence Committee](#) to the president pleading with him not to pardon Snowden. The letter calls Snowden a “serial exaggerator and fabricator” “who perpetrated the largest and most damaging public disclosure of classified information in our nation’s history.” In a [press release](#) issued after signing the letter, Pompeo said Snowden should get “prison rather than a pardon” because he is “not a whistleblower by any definition” but is, instead, “a liar and a criminal.”

With the prospect of Coats heading the ODNI, Flynn advising the president on national security, and Pompeo in charge of the CIA, it appears the surveillance hawks are prepared to come home to roost.



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