



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on February 29, 2012

Obama's Double Standard on Reporting Government Abuses

That got ABC News' [Jake Tapper](#) thinking. Carney was not the first Obama administration figure to praise journalists for putting their lives on the line to expose oppression in foreign countries. Vice President Joe Biden, for instance, had also issued a [statement](#) lauding Shadid for reporting "at extraordinary personal risk." The very same administration, however, seems bound and determined to prevent anyone from reporting on abuses by the U.S. government, vigorously prosecuting — or at the very least persecuting — those blowing the whistle on such abuses.



When he got a chance to speak, Tapper remarked on the administration's repeated praise for journalists in foreign countries. Then he hit Carney with the \$64,000 question: "How does that square with the fact that this administration has been so aggressively trying to stop aggressive journalism in the United States by using the Espionage Act to take whistleblowers to court?"

Tapper reminded Carney that the administration had invoked the Espionage Act of 1917 for the sixth time — double the number of times all previous administrations combined had invoked it — to prosecute a whistleblower: former CIA agent John Kiriakou, accused of leaking information about CIA torture of a terrorist suspect. "Certainly," Tapper added, "that's something that's in the public interest of the United States."

Yet the same administration that is prosecuting Kiriakou for revealing that the U.S. government engaged in brutality has nothing but good things to say about journalists who report on government brutality in foreign lands. Thus, said Tapper to Carney: "You want aggressive journalism abroad; you just don't want it in the United States."

Carney tap danced around the issue, first telling Tapper to talk to the Justice Department and later saying that the cases Tapper had mentioned "involve highly sensitive classified information," and "divulging that kind of information is a serious issue."

In fact, Tapper told the [New York Times](#), while the information divulged in these six cases may have been classified, "it's not like they are instances of government employees leaking the location of secret nuclear sites. These are classic whistle-blower cases that dealt with questionable behavior by government officials or its agents acting in the name of protecting America."

As the *Times* put it, "The majority of the recent prosecutions seem to have everything to do with administrative secrecy and very little to do with national security."

In case after case, the Espionage Act has been deployed as a kind of ad hoc Official Secrets Act, which is not a law that has ever found traction in America, a place where the people's right to



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know is viewed as superseding the government's right to hide its business.

Indeed, the paper noted the irony that while Kiriakou is being prosecuted aggressively merely for leaking some information to journalists, "none of the individuals who engaged in or authorized the waterboarding of terror suspects have [sic] been prosecuted."

Another individual prosecuted under the Espionage Act, former National Security Agency (NSA) employee Thomas Drake, was charged with 10 felony counts because he told a *Baltimore Sun* reporter that the NSA had spent \$1.2 billion on a data collection program from an outside vendor when the agency could have developed the program itself for just \$3 million — and made it more effective and less likely to violate individuals' privacy. In the end, writes the *Times*, "the case against him collapsed, and he pleaded guilty to a single misdemeanor, of misuse of a government computer" — but not before he had been forced out of his job at the NSA.

The administration doesn't always rely on prosecution to teach whistleblowers a lesson. It has other ways of retaliating against them, as Foreign Service Officer Peter Van Buren learned when he wrote the book *We Meant Well: How I Helped Lose the Battle for the Hearts and Minds of the Iraqi People*. Van Buren is still employed by the State Department, but he has been stripped of his security clearance, transferred to what he [calls](#) "a meaningless telework position," threatened with prosecution, and otherwise harassed. As a result, he writes, "a career that typically would extend another 10 years will be cut short in retaliation for [his] attempt to tell the truth about how taxpayer money was squandered in Iraq."

Van Buren documents other ways in which the Obama administration has lashed out at whistleblowers:

In Kiriakou's case, the CIA found an excuse to [fire his wife](#), also employed by the Agency, while she was on maternity leave. Whistleblower [Bradley Manning](#), accused of leaking Army and State Department documents to the website WikiLeaks, spent more than a year in the worst of punitive conditions in a U.S. Marine prison and was denied the chance even to appear in court to defend himself until almost two years after his arrest. Former chief military prosecutor at Guantanamo Morris Davis [lost his career](#) as a researcher at the Library of Congress for writing a critical op-ed for the *Wall Street Journal* and a letter to the editor at the *Washington Post* on double standards at the infamous prison, as did [Robert MacClean](#) for blowing the whistle on the Transportation Security Administration.

Four employees of the Air Force Mortuary in Dover, Delaware, attempted to address shortcomings at the facility, which handles the remains of all American service members who die overseas. Retaliation against them included firings, the placing of employees on indefinite administrative leave, and the imposition of five-day suspensions. The story repeats itself in the context of whistleblowers now suing the Food and Drug Administration for electronically spying on them when they tried to alert Congress about misconduct at the agency. We are waiting to see the Army's reaction to whistleblower Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Davis, who [documented](#) publicly ... that senior leaders of the Department of Defense intentionally and consistently misled the American people and Congress on the conduct and progress of the Afghan War.

In short, he says, the administration is conducting "an unprecedented assault on government whistleblowers and leakers of every sort." This from a President who promised to operate "the most open and transparent [administration] in history."

Of course, as the *Times* observes, Obama doesn't have a problem with *all* leaks, just those that reflect



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badly on the government: “Reporters were immediately and endlessly briefed on the ‘secret’ operation that successfully found and killed Osama bin Laden. And the drone program in Pakistan and Afghanistan comes to light in a very organized and systematic way every time there is a successful mission.”

What gets under Obama’s skin is the leaking of embarrassing information about the U.S. government. He loves when journalists report on foreign governments’ misdeeds — particularly when those reports can be used to drum up war fever — but not when they tattle on Washington’s abuses. As Tapper aptly summarized it, Obama’s opinion is that “the truth should come out abroad; it shouldn’t come out here.”



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