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NSA Whistleblowers on 60 Minutes: 9/11 Could Have Been Prevented

Jesselyn Radack, May 23, 2011

NSA whistleblower Thomas Drake and two other former NSA employees (Bill Binney and Kirk Wiebe) gave stunning interviews on *60 Minutes* last night.

In a hard-hitting, on-point report, they told Scott Pelley that NSA had technology---a program called ThinThread--that was ready to deploy in January 2001 and could have picked up critical intelligence prior to 9/11. NSA management rejected ThinThread, and embarked on a billion-dollar boondoggle, Trailblazer, a proposal designed figure how to do what ThinThread could do (collect and analyze massive amounts of data) on a massive and far more invasive scale. NSA also tossed ThinThread's privacy protections, leaving Americans vulnerable to illegal surveillance.

Drake called the failure to gather critical intelligence prior to 9/11

one of the great tragedies in the history of NSA

When Drake and the other whistleblowers went through proper channels to alert Congress and the Defense Department that the NSA was trading the nation's security for money at the expense of Americans' privacy, the government retaliated.

Drake is currently enduring the most severe whistleblower retaliation I have ever seen. He goes on trial June 13th for charges brought under the Espionage Act.

Tellingly, despite the damning evidence presented in the *60 Minutes* report, the government's reply was deafening silence. NSA did not comment on the systematic breakdown, corruption, waste, and mismanagement that led it to discard a valuable intelligence tool in order to pay contractors billions on a funding-vehicle-disguised-as-a-legit-program that never got off the ground. The agency did not comment on the allegations of illegal domestic surveillance.

The Justice Department did not comment. Attorney General Eric Holder failed to explain why, despite Obama's campaign commitment to protect whistleblowers, the administration is using our criminal justice system and (to add insult to injury) the Espionage Act--a law meant to go after spies, not whistleblowers--to retaliate against a guy who just won the Ridenhour Prize for Truth-Telling. Or, why three complainants on an Inspector General complaint (Binney, Wiebe, and former congressional staffer Diane Roark, who also appeared on *60 Minutes*) were subjected to armed FBI raids. Binney describes how the FBI burst into his home and

"pulled me out of the shower" while pointing a gun between his eyes.

Is this how we treat public servants who try to protect the country while obeying the law and trying to save taxpayer money?

That our government is using those tasked with **enforcing the law**-- the FBI and the Justice Department--in order to cover for government officials **breaking the law** is outrageous.

I've chronicled the Drake case on **Kos** (http://www.dailykos.com/story/2011/05/18/977111/-Democracy-Now%21-What-the-Prosecution-of-NSA-Whistleblower-Thomas-Drake-is-Really-About?via=blog_591987) for over a year now. Last week, Drake was featured in **Jane Mayer's must-read piece** (http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/05/23/110523fa_fact_mayer) in *The New Yorker*, which sheds new light on Drake's case and the massive unconstitutional domestic surveillance NSA engaged in after 9/11.

Please support Thomas Drake by **signing the petition** (<http://www.change.org/petitions/demand-accountability-for-the-selective-prosecution-of-nsa-whistleblower-tom-drake>) demanding some desperately needed accountability for the retaliatory prosecution. You can also "like" the **Save Tom Drake Facebook page** (<http://gaproject.nonprofitsoapbox.com/blog/31-2010/1128-nsa-whistleblowers>

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Jesselyn Radack is Homeland Security & Human Rights Director for the Government Accountability Project, the nation's leading **whistleblower** (<http://gapproject.nonprofitsoapbox.com/home>) advocacy organization. This post originally appeared in her **Daily Kos column** (<http://jesselyn-radack.dailykos.com/>).

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