



The NSA in the UK

**Constructing an Electronic Death Star
for US Covert War**

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Introduction

We are partially run by an irresponsible Secret Police ...the Capitalist Governments have created a new International made up of spies and 'agents provocateurs', and this in order to preserve for the privileged few in all countries the right to exploit their fellow men and women. (George Lansbury, 1921.)

NSA Menwith Hill squats on the North Yorkshire moors, its giant radomes multiplying like cancer cells to symbolise the poisonous growth of a secret state. If our US spy masters and their British acolytes had their way, we would know nothing significant about the base. The occasional press release from the Ministry of Defence might refer to its role in 'communications research' or ballistic-missile defence, but the underlying message is very clear. Don't worry your pretty little heads about things you can't even begin to understand.

Ordinary citizens are expected to swallow the great lie that the interception of electronic communications is a vital tool in the West's defences and that total secrecy has to be maintained because the sources and the means of obtaining information are highly sensitive. This Orwellian facade has masked the accumulation of power by what can reasonably be described as a shadow government.

Far from protecting democracy, this national security state covertly sustains US imperialism, the stranglehold of a capitalist elite on the world's non-renewable resources, and the monopoly profits of the giant arms corporations in the Military Industrial Intelligence Complex.

Over decades, peace activists, independent researchers and a small but immensely courageous group of whistleblowers have attempted to lift this veil of secrecy. Their contribution has been vital to understanding how the national security state evolved from the early days of the Cold War, and how the NSA accumulated the power and resources to build a global, electronic intelligence network with Menwith Hill as its leading, regional base.

These efforts, while on occasion generating considerable media attention and public interest, have always been countered by blanket assertions of state secrecy by the US and UK governments.

Edward Snowden's revelations on the NSA's major programmes have elevated the debate to a new level. For the first time, comprehensive documentary evidence has exposed its systematic interception of virtually all forms of electronic communication. A storm of outrage and protest has made the NSA's activities, and that of its junior partners like GCHQ, the most significant international media story of the last year.

Coverage has focused mainly on the technical means of interception and the implications for personal privacy. As yet, there is little analysis of how this global intelligence network, constructed at the cost of billions of dollars, fits into the military and strategic objectives for US power projection. Perhaps this is unsurprising given the sheer scale of personal data accumulated by the secret agencies. But the NSA's goal has been to develop an electronic surveillance network to support intelligence-based covert war, utilising remote-control weapons and special operations forces.

The official response to having some of the NSA's dirty linen exposed in public is one of damage limitation. If the NSA and GCHQ exceeded their powers by accumulating mass data, this was only out of a genuine desire to combat terrorism and with no intention of spying on ordinary people. All that is needed, therefore, is a minor recalibration of data collection techniques and some improved democratic oversight.

These are classic deflection tactics. The real debate should be on the creation of a secret, global intelligence network for covert war abroad and authoritarianism at home. The fundamental questions to be answered are, not how we reform the national security state but how we dismantle it, bring its leaders to account for their war crimes, and reclaim our democracies.

NSA Menwith Hill –A Brief History

A detailed study of the base was provided in the Yorkshire CND report, 'Lifting the Lid on Menwith Hill' in 2012. Here, key developments since the early 1960s are summarised in relation to new forms of intelligence-led warfare. During the Cold War the base was used by the United States, primarily, to intercept the military and diplomatic communications of the USSR and its Warsaw Pact allies in Eastern Europe. By the time that the NSA took full operational control in 1966, a major expansion was underway to develop satellite communications' interception.

US military and civilian personnel provided a range of expertise in areas such as the decryption of coded signals, supported by technical staff from leading arms corporations like Lockheed Martin with specialisms in computing and satellite links. Intelligence gained from these sources was transferred to the NSA headquarters at Fort Meade near Washington and combined with that from other regional centres like Pine Gap, run by the CIA in Australia's Northern Territory, and responsible for monitoring the East Asia region, including China and North Korea. Complementing signals interception was the growth of highly-accurate satellite imagery provided by the NSA's sister agency the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO).

Menwith Hill's distinctive physical presence reflects the growth in satellite communications. The giant aluminium radomes, numbering over thirty now, mask the large micro-wave interception dishes targeting foreign military and commercial satellites. Signals that leak into space are also captured by a fleet of giant US military satellites in geosynchronous orbits. The base's responsibilities were extended from its original focus to include the Middle East, the Indian ocean and Africa, e.g., during the first Gulf War, Menwith Hill located Iraqi military communications headquarters to support air strikes during the early stages of the invasion.

Less visible but equally significant, is the

capacity to intercept communications through the global, fibre-optic network. The base was originally linked to UK telephone land-lines carried by copper cable, but the NSA recognised that it had to respond to the technological advantages of speed and data capacity offered by fibre-optic cables that were superseding satellite links as the preferred means of communication.

International subsea cables are intercepted by the NSA/GCHQ station at Bude in Cornwall for processing and further analysis at GCHQ headquarters in Cheltenham and at Menwith Hill. The NSA also has a communications centre at Croughton, near Milton Keynes in Northamptonshire linking this intelligence network directly to military headquarters in the United States and to commanders involved in military operations around the world.

Menwith Hill, therefore, provides the NSA with a combination of electronic communications interception, satellite-imagery downloads and analytical resources unmatched anywhere outside the United States, ensuring it has a pivotal role to play in US, global covert war.

The Snowden Revelations in Context

Edward Snowden's revelations have delivered a seismic shift in the popular awareness of the NSA's activities. What were classified programmes like Prism, have now become part of a common vocabulary on electronic surveillance in ways that would have been unthinkable less than a year ago.

As a systems security analyst for Booz Allen Hamilton, one of the leading private contractors to the NSA, Snowden had privileged access to an astonishing range of NSA documentation. When releasing a proportion of these to the Guardian newspaper, he took the brave decision to reveal his identity as the whistleblower. Although facing a long jail sentence if he ever returned to the United States, he was determined to carry out media interviews and defend his argument that exposing the NSA's

illegal spying was in the public interest.

Such a vital contribution should not detract from the role previously played by other whistleblowers, researchers and activists who had already, and again sometimes at great personal risk, provided a significant body of work on the NSA and the secret state. As early as the 1970s Margaret Newsham, a senior software engineer working for Lockheed Martin at Menwith Hill, revealed the extent of illegal activities, ranging from commercial spying on behalf of US corporations, to the interception of private telephone calls made by senior US politicians.

Research utilising available public sources, material gained from freedom of information releases and confidential documents extracted from the bases by peace activists, gradually built up a picture of the NSA's global network for electronic surveillance and the relationships with spy agencies of its subordinates in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

By the end of the 1990s, this research had delivered a sufficiently comprehensive picture of NSA activities to trigger political concerns. The European Parliament commissioned the Echelon reports that focused on the capacity of the NSA to carry out commercial espionage, such as the interception of confidential phone calls and faxes on international tenders for large civil aircraft contracts. The role of NSA bases in the UK and Germany was a major concern because of the detrimental effects on European companies and employment.

In significant ways, Echelon covered many of the issues that are now being highlighted under the Snowden revelations, including the extent of the surveillance and the abuse of rights to privacy. The European Parliament made a series of recommendations on accountability and transparency, calling for the UK and German governments to ensure that NSA bases on their territory complied with international law. What the report lacked, in contrast with Snowden, was any extensive documentary evidence. Despite

media coverage in both Europe and the USA, the official position of the US and UK governments was to simply deny that any illegal activities had taken place, while asserting that the interests of national security required the operations of NSA bases remained entirely secret.

The attacks on the World Trade Centers and the Pentagon in September 2001 were used to effectively close down any serious public debate on the role of the security agencies. Instead, the national security state was given even greater 'emergency' powers to extend electronic surveillance as the Bush administration continued its military build up prior to the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Courageously, in this overarching climate of authoritarianism, a small group of whistleblowers was still prepared to go on the public record as to how the NSA, despite repeated official denials, harvested vast amounts of data, including the personal emails and phone calls of private citizens. One notable whistleblower was Russell Tice, a former NSA employee who, from 2005 onwards, gave a series of interviews on the pervasiveness of NSA mass interception techniques that undermined constitutional rights to privacy and posed a growing threat to civil liberties.

But perhaps the most significant testimony came from the UK and a British whistleblower working at GCHQ during the months leading to the Gulf War. Katharine Gun was a linguist and intelligence analyst who, in January 2003, received an email from a senior NSA official requesting support from GCHQ to intercept the diplomatic communications of members of the UN Security Council. The objective was to gain intelligence on any potential opposition to plans for the invasion and, if necessary, to provide leverage on those countries and their UN representatives.

The one international institution dedicated to the peaceful resolution of disputes was being manipulated as a tool of US imperialism for an illegal war of invasion and occupation.

Gun was appalled at the hypocrisy of an official position that claimed to want a diplomatic solution, while secretly working to undermine the United Nations by using both NSA and GCHQ intelligence.

The contents of the email were anonymously leaked to the Observer newspaper but Gun was identified as the source after a police investigation and charged under the Official Secrets Act. For reasons never adequately explained, the charges were dropped, leading to speculation that any defence requests for official documents, including the Attorney General's opinion on the legality of the war, might have proved highly damaging to the government.

The Snowden revelations, therefore, should be considered in this wider historical context of evidence on the scale and significance of the NSA's activities. It is something of a paradox that we have an unprecedented level of technical detail but a very narrow debate that is being constructed almost entirely within the framework of civil rights and privacy issues, rather than one that encompasses these broader strategic questions of military power projection and US imperialism.

Perhaps this was inevitable, at least initially, since the Guardian and other mainstream media were able to lay out documentary evidence of the NSA's major surveillance programmes and how they reached into virtually all forms of private, electronic communication. Sustained exposure has created an environment in which the US and UK governments have found it impossible to fall back on the tried and trusted methods of citing national security to stifle public debate.

Attempts continue to be made to portray Snowden as a traitor and to condemn him and newspaper editors, like Alan Rusbridger of the Guardian, for undermining national security. But the cracks opened up have been so deep that many mainstream politicians, including leading conservatives, have acknowledged the need for a review of how the security agencies operate.

What has emerged is, essentially, a detailed picture of the mechanics of NSA surveillance. Prism focuses on the collection of stored internet data with the secret agreement of companies such as Google, Yahoo and Microsoft. GCHQ's major contribution to the NSA is through the Tempora programme, focused on the interception of fibre-optic cables and collection of mass data from phone calls and emails. XKeyscore is a software programme used by the NSA to interrogate the data using combinations of email addresses and keywords that act as filters for more focused surveillance. Other important capabilities include degrading encryption technologies prior to their installation in secure communications systems.

Also revealed are the long-term arrangements that the NSA has had with countries outside its traditional network of spying subordinates. Sweden is particularly interesting as a country considered politically neutral and independent of the US imperial system but which has provided the NSA with strategic support through the interception of Russian-origin communications.

However, with a few exceptions, notably the journalists Glenn Greenwald and Jeremy Scahill in the United States and Seamus Milne in the UK, the strategic impetus for this extraordinary global surveillance network is hardly covered in a mainstream media that seems comfortable only with a narrative focusing on abuses to privacy rights.

Occasionally, the Snowden documentation that has been released provides tantalising glimpses into the netherworld of covert war at the heart of the NSA's work. One example is the location tracking of cell-phone calls made and received by the wife of an alleged Al Qaeda suspect, Hassan Ghul, who was subsequently identified and killed in a drone attack in North Waziristan in October 2012. The story revealed how the NSA worked closely with the CIA to co-ordinate intelligence prior to the attack. This, and other forms of intelligence-led, covert war

should be key issues emerging from the Snowden revelations, and in the broader context of evidence gathered previously on NSA activities.

US Imperialism and Covert War

Covert war represents an expansion of US imperialism by means other than invasion and occupation. Historically, the Cold War was always a mixture of confrontation with the USSR through superior forces deployed across a global network of military bases, and the subversion of progressive governments when their attempts to control their own resources threatened Western corporate interests.

In 1951, the Mossadeq government was elected in Iran with a popular mandate to nationalise oil production. The CIA organised a military coup to replace it with a compliant regime providing unrestricted access to major Western oil companies. Various forms of political subversion and covert action continued over the decades, including the overthrow in 1973 of the left-wing Allende government in Chile by a CIA-sponsored military coup, and the covert funding in Nicaragua of the Contra rebels against the Sandinista government during the 1980s and early 1990s.

Since the end of the Cold War the United States and its allies have maintained this combination of military power projection and covert warfare, including two major conventional wars in the Persian Gulf to secure oil resources, and raids by special operations forces combined with drone strikes in a growing number of countries including Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen. More recently, cyber warfare can also be added to the list of covert actions, with attacks on computer systems at Iran's civil nuclear research facilities.

While the ideological narrative has shifted from the war on communism to the war on terrorism, the long-term strategy has been to maintain or install pro-Western regimes

where energy and raw material supplies are at stake. Governments that reject neo-liberalism and take control of their own resources to fund social programmes are, essentially, demonised. Cuba, and more recently, Venezuela, represent an extreme danger simply by challenging US hegemony and condemning it on the international stage for what it really is, the greatest single threat that exists to world peace.

The invasions and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan are generally interpreted as a disaster for the United States, reflected in the commitment to finally withdraw all troops and a reluctance to embark on any further conventional military actions that involve large-scale troop deployments. Yet, in geo-strategic terms, the wars have led to fractured states with compliant elites prepared to accommodate Western corporations on favourable terms.

In Iraq's case, a brutal regime has violently suppressed the popular opposition, led by trade unions, that has called for greater accountability over the use of oil revenues. More recently, the United States has attempted to exploit the chaos in post-Gaddafi Libya to promote CIA-funded warlords who are vying for control of oil supplies.

Far from being an imperial power in decline, the United States has embarked on a fundamental restructuring of its armed forces to achieve similar outcomes around the world, using special operations forces and remote-control weaponry, underpinned by a global intelligence and military communications network.

The overall number of US bases and permanently stationed military personnel is being cut, but special operations forces will have increased to 70,000 by 2015. They are trained for rapid deployment using, smaller, logistics bases commonly known as 'lilly pads'. The capacity to deploy remote control weaponry has also been substantially enhanced, with new bases in the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf. The number of

armed and surveillance drones will have increased to over seven hundred by 2020, led by a fleet of 320 new-generation Reaper drones that will be larger, faster, longer-range and armed with Hellfire missiles and laser-guided bombs.

Underneath the military structure for covert war are further, secret layers. As US armed forces leave Afghanistan, responsibility for future operations is being passed to CIA operatives who effectively constitute a clandestine US army. Private military companies carry out similar tasks and in such close association with the CIA and US military forces as to make them a de-facto extension of this network.

The NSA's primary responsibility has been to create a surveillance system that can support covert war and real-time, military intervention anywhere in the world. Since the 1950s it has been the key federal agency funding R&D on successive generations of supercomputers and software to analyse coded signals.

Now, under highly-secret, 'black' programmes worth billions of dollars, the NSA provides the capacity to track movements using cell-phones, emails and internet communications. In partnership with the NRO, it has also procured a new global fleet of spy satellites. constructed by a Boeing-led consortium at an estimated cost of \$25 billion, and capable of providing extremely detailed imagery.

A useful concept here is the 'triangulation' of intelligence, since the US military has access, not only to the NSA's satellite-based systems, but also imagery and electronic interceptions from surveillance drones and aircraft in patrol over designated areas, as well as human intelligence from spys and special forces on the ground. All this is fed into a global military communications network to coordinate operations. However, the primary satellite intelligence is provided by the NSA's regional bases without which real-time, covert war would not be achievable.

Menwith Hill's Operational Capability - 2015

Menwith Hill has received major investment to create the most technologically-advanced, intelligence hub in the world for covert war. The construction of a new operations building has doubled capacity, while diesel-electric generators provide an uninterrupted and independent source of electricity, sufficient for the needs of a medium-sized town.

Less visible is the investment in technology to integrate electronic interceptions and imagery downloads from dedicated spy satellites, and the processing and analysing of data at high speed through on-site supercomputers allied to decryption software. Overall workforce numbers have increased from 1,800 in the late 1990s to 2,300, the vast majority being US personnel, supplemented by around 100 GCHQ personnel and other UK ancillary staff.

However, once this capital investment programme is completed in 2015, overall numbers are set to fall. New technologies will automatically process an increased volume of interceptions, using sophisticated algorithms for encryption and foreign language analysis that would have been previously carried out by lower-grade operatives.

The remaining workforce, incorporating a large proportion of specialised staff from US arms corporations and those seconded from the private sector to the NSA as military and civilian personnel, will constitute the most sophisticated technological elite ever assembled to facilitate covert war.

A typical day for this electronic high-priesthood would be to prioritise the range of potential targets based on historical intelligence gained from various sources as to the pattern of communications and movements. Satellites with high-resolution capabilities are then focused on particular locations to provide real-time imagery. Key triggers might be cell-phone communications from a building or a vehicle matched to satellite imagery. Data on targets and

locations is used to confirm coordinates for an attack that is then taken over by the military, either special operations forces commanders or drone flight controllers, utilising their own intelligence and ultimately responsible for carrying out the mission.

The Quasi-legal Framework for State Terrorism

US and UK-supported covert war has destroyed what little protection there ever existed under international law for both foreign combatants and civilians. This legal framework evolved to cover the treatment of prisoners of war and civilian populations under the control of occupying military forces. But individual human rights were always subordinate to the legitimisation of extreme violence, albeit in temporary and exceptional circumstances. Most obviously, the bombing of cities and mass slaughter of civilians was justified on the basis that the industrial hinterland was vital to the enemy's war effort.

Under covert war, even those limited protections have been discarded and international law simply turned on its head. The national security state, completely ignoring the obligations that normally arise after a formal declaration of war, has simply given itself permission to carry out acts, like assassinations, anywhere in the world where it decides US imperial interests are threatened.

This is not to say that the United States and the UK have abandoned the need for a legal framework. On the contrary, they have gone to great lengths to create a cloak of quasi-judicial respectability. The commitment to human rights during conflicts is still argued to have the highest priority but because of the nature of the terrorist threat, the judicial process has to be carried out through a special court, the Foreign Intelligence Security Court (FISC), handing out secret judgements. Conveniently, it is only accountable to the national security state itself.

A series of assumptions underpin this interpretation of the legality of covert war. Most obviously, that a suspect can be found guilty without due process and without the presumption of innocence. Once a military operation is underway, the target can be then be assassinated rather than taken prisoner. While named individuals are the primary consideration, anyone in close proximity such as those travelling in the same vehicle or occupying the same building are also considered to be associates and, therefore, legitimate targets. An extension to this practice is 'signature strikes' where groups that display what the national security state defines as the characteristics of terrorist behaviour can also be targeted.

Inevitably, there will be civilian casualties from these attacks since they are carried out on buildings and vehicles in built-up areas using powerful missiles and other high-explosive weapons. But these casualties are either officially denied, or if proof exists, then chalked off as collateral damage that can be justified because a serious threat to the homeland is being eliminated.

A more comprehensive, quasi-legal framework for state terrorism would be difficult to construct. Evidence of US and UK war crimes is emerging from independent sources, mainly on the number of civilian deaths and injuries from drone strikes, now running into their thousands, and the murder of civilians by special operations forces. The scale of atrocities will be much greater and should include civilian casualties from operations where US and UK special forces co-ordinate intelligence with the indigenous troops of allies in what are, effectively, proxy wars for US imperialism.

The international community's response to these abuses has been shameful. All that the United Nations can offer, when its bureaucracy eventually creaks into life, is a form of weasel words, mildly rebuking Western governments and reminding them of human rights obligations. The national security state can continue its terrorist activities knowing that the United Nations

submits to its allotted role in the imperial power structure, namely, advocating the prosecution of African war lords, while turning a blind eye to atrocities carried out by the United States and its allies.

Bringing Covert War Home

The spectre of an external threat has always been used to strengthen the power of the state over its citizens. But a new form of authoritarianism is being put in place that moves far beyond the realms of mass data interception and the erosion of the rights to privacy. A fully-evolved national security state has at its disposal draconian executive powers and a range of repressive technologies applied and adapted from covert war abroad. These are directed at crushing any political activism that the national security state, itself, defines as subversive.

Wholesale monitoring and infiltration by the secret services of political groups campaigning on peace and social justice has been a systematic feature of Western societies and should be considered the norm rather than the exception. For example, the FBI carried out illegal surveillance of protest groups, centred around the anti-Vietnam war movement during the 1960s and 1970s; while in the UK, MI5 systematically spied on leading trade union figures like Arthur Scargill during the miners strike of 1984-5, and on peace groups like CND when its anti-cruise missile campaign attracted mass support during the early 1980s.

Nor is the threat from terrorism new. Islamic fundamentalists used conventional explosives in an attack on the World Trade Center in February 1993, while an extremist, right-wing militia group was responsible for the bomb that destroyed the federal building in Oklahoma City in April 1995. The UK had to endure a long-term IRA campaign of bombings that culminated in attacks on London in April 1993 and on Manchester in June 1996.

After the events of September 11th 2001, the

powers intended to deal with particular groups dedicated to acts of violence, have been secretly extended by the national security state to cover any domestic political opposition that it defines as undermining the war on terror. Surveillance takes place through the traditional means of phone tapping as well as infiltration by spies and agents provocateurs. But triangulation techniques from covert war are being used, including satellite imagery, surveillance drones and cell-phone tracking of movements to provide real-time monitoring of targeted political groups and individuals. Never before has the state had such a comprehensive organisation and the technological resources to impose authoritarian rule.

Conclusion

The UK was once described as America's unsinkable aircraft carrier in the North Atlantic but now it is a 21st century, electronic death star for US covert war. The NSA's multi-billion dollar intelligence network has spread its tentacles across the entire country, from Bude in Cornwall to Menwith Hill, the beating, malevolent heart in North Yorkshire.

Paradoxically, at a time when the Snowden revelations have catapulted the NSA's activities into the public domain, the overarching context of US imperialism and the crucial role that electronic intelligence plays in new forms of covert war have barely registered. Virtually the entire focus of the mainstream media has been on data interception techniques and the implications for personal privacy. This is like polishing the chalice on the altar, while the Inquisition continues to torture people in the dungeons below the cathedral.

At times, it feels we are drowning in a sea of acronyms and technical descriptions about the NSA's programmes, rather than using this accumulation of documentary evidence for a thorough and wide-ranging debate on the true nature of the national security state, and how its accumulation of power and resources threatens global peace while undermining the very foundations of democratic society.

Any serious analysis would begin with the historical context provided by earlier studies on the NSA and the testimony of previous whistleblowers. Two important examples are the European Parliament's Echelon reports from the late 1990s, detailing the commercial spying that took place at Menwith Hill on behalf of US corporations; and Katharine Gun's evidence of GCHQ's complicity in the NSA's attempts to undermine the United Nations by spying on members of the Security Council prior to the Gulf War in 2003. They illustrate the long-term policy of the United States and the UK to use electronic intelligence in pursuit of geo-strategic goals and their total contempt for international law.

The more this drip-feed of post-Snowden, privacy-intrusion stories continues, whether on techniques for processing metadata, or the infiltration of social networks, the more this looks like a deliberate and orchestrated attempt to narrow the debate. The mainstream media can still claim to be defending the causes of civil rights and democratic accountability, while completely ignoring the brutal realities of US imperialism and power projection for which the NSA's global electronic network was constructed.

After the initial display of outrage and condemnation against Snowden, the narrative being put in place by government spin-doctors, supported by a compliant media, is one of bureaucratic over-zealousness on the part of the security services. All those systematically anti-democratic and anti-constitutional activities, mapped out in surgical detail by the NSA and GCHQ in their own top-secret documents, will simply be relegated to the box labelled unfortunate but understandable errors of judgement in the war on terror.

The policy response will focus on cosmetic concessions such as on the storage of, and access to, intercepted data and some improved democratic oversight. The debate, if it can be dignified with that description, will be on the limited recommendations for reform, with accompanying articles by the great and the good on the balance between freedom and security. Nothing of any fundamental significance will change and then the story will fizzle out altogether.

From the perspective of the national security state, this outcome could hardly be bettered. What should have been a paradigm shift in perceptions that built a momentum for radical change, will have been channelled into a damage-limitation and distraction exercise, while the real work of global imperialism and domestic authoritarianism continues unabated.

Despite the withdrawal of troops from Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States retains a massive military supremacy and has extended

its global electronic surveillance network to support covert war. At the heart of this strategy is a mixture of fear and contempt. Fear of the good example - strong, progressive governments that retain control over their natural resources and use public funds to directly support investment for the poorest in society. Contempt for genuine efforts to bring democracy to authoritarian, pro-Western states, despite their appalling human rights records and the accumulation of wealth on a grotesque scale by their capitalist elites.

Post-Iraq 'disengagement' is really the new era of global covert war, as the United States attempts to take advantage of social unrest and civil conflict around the world. Dependency on US aid and forms of military support will be followed by covert war in countries that have strategic significance for energy resources and raw materials. Everything will be done, ranging from secret assassinations by special operations forces, drone strikes and cyber attacks to destabilise progressive governments and undermine popular opposition movements prepared to stand up to US aggression and capitalist domination.

There can be no other description for US covert war than state terrorism on a global scale. But under the present structure of international institutions, the prosecution of Western leaders is, quite literally, impossible. When such issues are raised, the national security state, with impeccable Orwellian logic, simply argues that covert operations are subject to the same rules of law that apply to conventional war, but that the framework must remain secret because of the nature of the terrorist threat.

So when faced with independent evidence on thousands of civilian deaths and casualties, the official response is one of blanket denial, or the occasional and reluctant admission of 'collateral damage'. In this way, the US and UK can insist that their domestic legal frameworks are more than adequate for dealing with cases that might require further action, including the very rare, criminal

prosecution of individuals carrying out atrocities that can't be whitewashed away.

Yet, if international law were consistently applied, using the Nuremberg principles, then the leaders of the national security state, responsible for the policies of state terrorism, would be the focus of criminal prosecutions. Instead, a totally supine United Nations bureaucracy produces the occasional report on new forms of warfare that might contain mild rebukes to Western leaders for their acts of military aggression but studiously avoids any rigorous condemnation or call for legal proceedings.

The abject failure of international institutions shouldn't mean that we simply do nothing. At the time of the Vietnam War, Bertrand Russell and other prominent peace activists instigated an International War Crimes Tribunal, effectively carrying out the legal process of hearings and written testimony that should have taken place through a recognised international court. Although having no formal status, the published judgement, itemising the range of war crimes committed by US forces against the Vietnamese people, served as a powerful, symbolic reminder that the Nuremberg principles still applied and that US leaders should be held to account.

A compelling case can be made that US and UK-supported covert war, in its various forms around the world, requires a new People's Tribunal with the responsibility to collate evidence and provide a comprehensive judgement on the war crimes of leading political, military and secret service figures from the national security state, including the NSA commander at Menwith Hill and senior UK personnel at GCHQ.

The existence of a People's Tribunal on covert war crimes could also stimulate a political process that raises fundamental questions about the threat posed by the national security state to democratic society and generates the momentum for a popular campaign to have the whole corrupt edifice dismantled.

From the UK perspective, it is little short of a

national disgrace that the accumulation of power by the secret state has occurred without any serious debate through Parliament. At least the Senate hearings of the Church Committee in 1975 provided a major US forum in which the surveillance activities of the intelligence agencies were put under real and public scrutiny. It concluded with a clear warning from Senator Church that the combination of unaccountable power and the technologies of mass surveillance could lead to a form of tyranny.

In Australia, during the late 1990s, a Joint Standing Committee on Treaties comprising members from both the House of Representatives and the Senate heard detailed expert evidence on the Pine Gap base and concluded that its electronic spying served US rather than Australian national security interests. More recently, in the aftermath of the Snowden revelations, the European Parliament's Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs Committee has been taking detailed evidence from European and US witnesses, including leading whistleblowers, on NSA abuses to civil rights.

All we have had in the UK is the usual deafening silence from a bunch of gutless politicians who would rather let the national security state continue to subvert democracy than have even a single Parliamentary investigation on such minor issues as acts of state terrorism carried out from the UK by a foreign power with the collusion of our own secret services.

George Lansbury, the great radical socialist said, nearly a century ago now, that the Secret Police formed a shadow government and an international system to preserve capitalism for the few against the interests of the working classes. But even he would have been shocked at how pervasive and oppressive that system has become.

The national security state is now a seamless web of political and corporate power that dominates Western society. For generations, senior political figures and officials from the military, the secret services and government

departments have been recruited into the boardrooms of the giant arms corporations. In turn, a steady flow of government contracts for R&D and procurement has generated billions of dollars in profits.

This Military Industrial Intelligence Complex has now reached a stage of maturity where it determines the government's priorities for both conventional warfare and covert operations abroad, while adapting these for domestic use. A continuous stream of new, repressive technologies feeds the profits of the complex, including the latest set of innovations such as micro-drones, combining reconnaissance and lethal force for military operations in urban areas.

The framework for authoritarian control is being remorselessly put in place and any democratic opposition re-defined as a subversive threat. The closest historical equivalent is the early years of the Nazi regime in Germany during the 1930s, when the trappings of constitutional government were used to formalise racial law in such a way as to restrict, and then eliminate altogether, the rights of Jews. The burning down of the Reichstag finally ended any pretence of democratic governance behind a coup d'etat and the establishment of a fascist dictatorship where all power rested with the fuhrer. At the apex of the 21st century, national security state sits Barak Obama who will be remembered not as the first black president but as the first big brother president.

Ordinary citizens are being psychologically prepared for the deployment of the army and a militarized police force on the streets of our major cities. Beginning with the declaration of a state of emergency, the plans for domestic, covert war can then be put into action. Identified political activists will be rounded up and anyone who falls through the net will be hunted down by special operations forces using the full range of repressive technologies. The national security state will then have achieved its ultimate objective, the elimination of any democratic threat to its existence.

How did it come to this? Firstly, we must acknowledge our own culpability in having allowed a grotesque perversion of democracy to take place under the banner of national security. Immense political courage and organisation will be required to fight back and restore the democratic rights that generations of ordinary working people fought so hard to achieve.

The national security state must be dismantled, followed by a formal declaration to the rest of the world that all the powers to intercept electronic communications will be rescinded, and that the USA and the UK will deal with other countries openly and honestly as befits the tenets of a living democracy.

Even to suggest an agenda like this is to risk being labelled either hopelessly idealistic or dangerously extremist. But the strength of democratic societies lies not in their capacity to inflict violence on others, nor to enmesh their institutions in a web of steel, but in their ability to resolve conflicts peacefully and to use their scarce resources of skills and technologies for the public good.

We are entering a crucial period where the Western democracies must lead a revolutionary transformation in the structure of the international economy if we are to make progress on the real security threats that face us all, including irreversible climate change and the massive global inequalities in wealth and power. For the UK, nothing could be more symbolic of a new approach to peace and security than the closure of Menwith Hill.

Even after the Snowden revelations, NSA bases are still perceived as remote listening stations and as passive accumulators of electronic signals. If you want an image of Menwith Hill then visualise streams of blood flowing down each of those pristine white radomes to form a river of blood cascading over the moors and submerging the streets of Harrogate.

The record of its appalling crimes should never be expunged from the history books, as a stark testimony to US imperialism and

covert war, but its physical presence must be, brick by brick and radome by radome. A campaign of direct action to close the base will be met by the full repressive powers of the national security state but that is the challenge we all face, to reclaim our democracies in the interests of working people rather than a capitalist and militarist elite.