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White House Trains Efforts on Media Leaks

Sources, Reporters Could Be Prosecuted

By [Dan Eggen](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer Sunday, March 5, 2006; Page A01

The Bush administration, seeking to limit leaks of classified information, has launched initiatives targeting journalists and their possible government sources. The efforts include several FBI probes, a polygraph investigation inside the CIA and a warning from the Justice Department that reporters could be prosecuted under espionage laws.

In recent weeks, dozens of employees at the CIA, the National Security Agency and other intelligence agencies have been interviewed by agents from the FBI's Washington field office, who are investigating possible leaks that led to reports about secret CIA prisons and the NSA's warrantless domestic surveillance program, according to law enforcement and intelligence officials familiar with the two cases.

Numerous employees at the CIA, FBI, Justice Department and other agencies also have received letters from Justice prohibiting them from discussing even unclassified issues related to the NSA program, according to sources familiar with the notices. Some GOP lawmakers are also considering whether to approve tougher penalties for leaking.

In a little-noticed case in California, FBI agents from Los Angeles have already contacted reporters at the Sacramento Bee about stories published in July that were based on sealed court documents related to a terrorism case in Lodi, according to the newspaper.

Some media watchers, lawyers and editors say that, taken together, the incidents represent perhaps the most extensive and overt campaign against leaks in a generation, and that they have worsened the already-tense relationship between mainstream news organizations and the White House.

"There's a tone of gleeful relish in the way they talk about dragging reporters before grand juries, their appetite for withholding information, and the hints that reporters who look too hard into the public's business risk being branded traitors," said New York Times Executive Editor Bill Keller, in a statement responding to questions from The Washington Post. "I don't know how far action will follow rhetoric, but some days it sounds like the administration is declaring war at home on the values it professes to be promoting abroad."

President Bush has called the NSA leak "a shameful act" that was "helping the enemy," and said in December that he was hopeful the Justice Department would conduct a full investigation into the disclosure.

"We need to protect the right to free speech and the First Amendment, and the president is doing that," said White House spokesman Trent Duffy. "But, at the same time, we do need to protect classified information which helps fight the war on terror."

Disclosing classified information without authorization has long been against the law, yet such leaks are one of the realities of life in Washington -- accounting for much of the back-channel conversation that goes on daily among journalists, policy intellectuals, and current and former government officials.

Presidents have also long complained about leaks: Richard Nixon's infamous "plumbers" were originally set up to plug them, and he tried, but failed, to prevent publication of a classified history of the Vietnam War called the Pentagon Papers. Ronald Reagan exclaimed at one point that he was "up to my keister" in leaks.

Bush administration officials -- who complain that reports about detainee abuse, clandestine surveillance and other topics have endangered the nation during a time of war -- have arguably taken a more aggressive approach than other recent administrations, including a clear willingness to take on journalists more directly if necessary.

"Almost every administration has kind of come in saying they want an open administration, and then getting bad press and fuming about leaks," said David Greenberg, a Rutgers University journalism professor and author of "Nixon's Shadow." "But it's a pretty fair statement to say you haven't seen this kind of crackdown on leaks since the Nixon administration."

Understanding the Plame Affair

- [Key Players in the CIA Leak Case](#)
- Analysis and short biographies of the main individuals involved in the investigation of the leak of Valerie Plame's identity to the press.
- [Explaining the Charges](#)
- [Q&A: The Leak Case Facts](#)
- [Timeline: Libby's Role](#)
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I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby, Vice President Dick Cheney's chief of staff, is at the center of an investigation into the leaking of CIA agent Valerie Plame's identity.

From FindLaw

- [Plame Investigation Leaks](#) Links to court rulings, briefs, and government documents pertaining to the leak investigation (and the First Amendment battle).
- [The Intelligence Identities Protection Act of 1982](#)

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