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Intelligence Chief: Snowden and 'Accomplices' Should Return 'Stolen' NSA Documents

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The head of the U.S. intelligence community publicly asked [Edward Snowden](#) and "his accomplices" to return the documents he has "stolen" from the [NSA](#).

James Clapper, the Director of National Intelligence, appeared before the Senate Intelligence Committee on Wednesday for the annual hearing on the assessment of worldwide threats to the United States. Despite the hearing not being about Snowden or the NSA, the shadow of the former contractor, who has been leaking countless top secret documents for more than seven months, loomed large.

"Snowden [claims](#) that he's won and that his mission has accomplished," Clapper said during his opening statement. "If that is so, I call on him and his accomplices to facilitate the return of the remaining stolen documents."

Clapper made the request after warning that Snowden's disclosures have caused "profound damage" and as a result, "the nation is less safe and its people less secure." Clapper also took a shot at Snowden, referring to "the supreme ironies associated with his choice of freedom-loving nations and beacons of free expression from which to rail about what an Orwellian state he thinks this country has become."

This is not the first time a U.S. official has asked Snowden to surrender his trove of sensitive documents — [however many they might be](#). Speaking with CBS's 60 Minutes, Richard Ledgett, an NSA official, said the agency [has considered](#) offering Snowden amnesty if he returns the documents. But Clapper's choice of words were peculiar.

It wasn't immediately clear who Clapper was referring to when he said "accomplices." Shawn Turner, a spokesperson for the Director of National Intelligence, told *Mashable* that Clapper meant "anyone who is assisting Edward Snowden further harm our nation through the

unauthorized disclosure of stolen documents." (Turner declined to be more specific when asked if that included journalists.)

During the hearing *Guardian* journalist Spencer Ackerman, who has worked on some of the paper's stories based on the Snowden documents [tweeted](#): "I guess he means us?"

Clapper wasn't the only one taking advantage of the public hearing to get in a few jabs. Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), who has historically been one of the [senators most critical](#) of NSA surveillance, said Americans don't trust their intelligence leaders anymore because of "reckless reliance on secret interpretations of the law" and "years of misleading and deceptive statements."

Wyden only specified a couple of examples of deceptive statements, most notably the one when NSA chief Gen. Keith Alexander [denied](#) the NSA keeps "files" or "dossiers" on Americans. But in his direct attack on Alexander, Wyden was probably also pointing his finger at Clapper.

In March of last year, Wyden [asked](#) Clapper whether the NSA collects "any type of data at all on millions or hundreds of millions of Americans." The head of the spy community simply answered: "No, sir [...] not wittingly."

Months later, when Snowden documents revealed that answer to be at the very least misleading, since the NSA has a database of virtually all Americans' [phone records](#), Clapper [defended](#) himself saying he just responded in "the least untruthful manner."

Some have called Clapper's original answer a [lie](#), and a group led by Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) even [asked](#) the White House to fire Clapper on Tuesday.

During the hearing, there was also time to talk about the NSA bulk telephone metadata program. President Barack Obama [announced](#) last week that the program should be reformed. The administration's privacy watchdog has labelled it as "[illegal](#)," and an independent study found it has a minimal impact on stopping terrorist attacks, despite the fact that U.S. officials [claimed the opposite](#) for months.

Asked about its effectiveness, Clapper didn't claim it stopped countless attacks this time.

Clapper answered by saying "it's an important tool," but he also added that "simply using the metric of plots foiled is not necessarily a way to get at the value of the program."

Julian Sanchez, a researcher at the Cato Institute who focuses on technology and civil liberties, noted that the intelligence community has only itself to blame for the focus on foiled plots.

Julian Sanchez @normative

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The reason people foolishly think "plots foiled" is the appropriate metric is that the IC *made* it the metric. Then bogus claims collapsed.

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