

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH'S VENDETTA AGAINST JAMES RISEN

Sorry for the silence today – I've been traveling. Meanwhile, this piece – talking about how insane the government's pursuit of James Risen has been – was published over at the Nation.

We focused particularly in the number of top officials implicated in stories Risen published.

But under strong pressure from White House officials—including some later implicated in the legally suspect program—*Times* editors delayed the story's publication for over a year, until December 2005. The coverage won Risen and Lichtblau a Pulitzer Prize for "carefully sourced stories on secret domestic eavesdropping that stirred a national debate." It was the kind of debate that the people running the US surveillance state had been desperate to avoid.

The belated publication of those stories came just before Risen brought out a book that contained reporting on the wiretap program and several other sinister initiatives under categories like "counterterrorism" and "counterproliferation." On January 13, 2006, the week after Risen's book *State of War* reached the stores, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales told a news conference that an investigation into the *Times* wiretap stories was under way and that "it's too early to make decisions regarding whether or not reporters should go to jail." Though not apparent at the time, facts later emerged to show that Gonzales was implicated in the illegal wiretapping

that Risen exposed. (As White House counsel, Gonzales had authorized continued operation of the program after the Justice Department refused to do so.)

[snip]

Some high-ranking individuals have been mainstays in the continuation of policies that Risen exposed in his book. John Brennan—President Obama’s former counterterrorism czar and now CIA director—has been at notable cross-purposes with both Risen and Sterling for more than a decade. Brennan was a senior CIA official when the agency rolled out its torture program under Bush, which came under intense public scrutiny after the use of waterboarding was revealed in a May 13, 2004, front-page *Times* story with Risen as the lead reporter. And Brennan played a key role in the illegal wiretap program, overseeing the production of what personnel in the program called the “scary memos” intended to justify the domestic spying exposed by Risen.