

MAYBE THE SPOOKS DON'T WANT FTC TO KNOW NSA'S TRICKS?

In awesome news, the Federal Trade Commission has hired Ashkan Soltani – the tech expert who helped Bart Gellman on many of his most important Snowden scoops – as its new Chief Technology Officer.

The news has elicited wails from NSA's mail mouthpieces, Stewart Baker and Michael Hayden.

"I'm not trying to demonize this fella, but he's been working through criminally exposed documents and making decisions about making those documents public," said Michael Hayden, a former NSA director who also served as CIA director from 2006 to 2009. In a telephone interview with FedScoop, Hayden said he wasn't surprised by the lack of concern about Soltani's participation in the Post's Snowden stories. "I have no good answer for that."

[snip]

Stewart Baker, a former NSA general counsel, said, while he's not familiar with the role Soltani would play at the FTC, there are still problems with his appointment. "I don't think anyone who justified or exploited Snowden's breach of confidentiality obligations should be trusted to serve in government," Baker said.

I find Hayden's wails especially disgusting, given the way – it is now clear – the government spent so much effort covering up how he extended the illegal wiretap program in March 2004. I mean, I'm not trying to demonize the fella, but he's a criminal, and yet he's complaining about the press reporting on abuses?

That said, I'm curious whether this isn't the real reason there seems to be organized pushback against Soltani's hire.

Soltani is scheduled to give a presentation Nov. 19 at the Strata+Hadoop World conference in Barcelona, Spain, on "how commercial tracking enables government surveillance." According to the conference website, Soltani's presentation will explore how "the dropping costs of bulk surveillance is aiding government eavesdropping, with a primary driver being how the NSA leverages data collected by commercial providers to collect information about innocent users worldwide."

At FTC, Soltani will be in a role where he can directly influence the kind of regulatory pressure placed on data collectors to protect user privacy. He understands – probably far more than we know from the WaPo stories – how NSA is capitalizing on already collected data. Which means he may be able to influence how much remains available to the spooks.

So maybe all this wailing is an effort to sustain the big commercial data's unwitting support for big spooky data?