



## The Price Of Leaks

[Peter Brookes](#)

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The nameless, faceless leakers of classified national- security information *aren't* heroes, as some would claim. In fact, they're nothing more than spies - veritable "moles," giving "aid and comfort" to our enemies, including al Qaeda.

The unauthorized exposure of the overseas terrorist-finance-tracking program in The New York Times is just the latest example of gutless bottom-feeders advancing their own agendas at the expense of national security. These people have betrayed their colleagues, and Americans have - or will - die as a result.

Enough is enough. The government, especially Congress, must do much more to clamp down on these "treasonous" acts by developing policies and practices to deter the leaking of classified information to the press - and punish it.

Don't buy the various excuses that leaks can serve the public interest. All government employees with access to classified information are duty bound to protect it, under penalty of law.

They can still blow the whistle on a policy or program gone awry. Measures exist to make competent authorities (*not* the press) aware. Each agency's Inspector General is a good first option; if that avenue fails, there are the congressional oversight committees. The intelligence committees, with their cleared staffs and secure hearing rooms, can take informal/formal testimony in open or closed sessions.

Leaking *operational* (as opposed to analytical) information is an especially egregious offense. Disclosing sensitive intelligence sources, methods or plans puts both American

operatives and the foreign agents working on our behalf in danger.

The bad guys read the press - especially ours, which is rife with sensitive information. They use this knowledge to their operational advantage by changing their tactics and plans to outwit or outmaneuver us.

For instance, terrorists will change how they move the money used to shed more innocent blood - maybe even here in the United States - because of the information exposed in Friday's New York Times.

Leaks also make foreign partners reluctant to share. Why would a foreign intelligence service dole out info gained from an operation that, if exposed, would put their *other* operations, personnel and agents at risk - or prove embarrassing? (This matters a lot: International cooperation is critical in fighting transnational threats such as terrorism and problems like Iran and North Korea's nuclear-weapons programs.)

Moreover, what foreign agent would want to work for U.S. intelligence if it means your cloak and dagger work might end up on the front page of an American newspaper, leading possibly to prison or a swift, short swing on the gallows? Just think of the gruesome consequences in Iraq . . .

Leaks also impair cooperation between U.S. government agencies -

with one agency failing to share intelligence with another for fear that its sources/methods may be unduly exposed to the public. This dread also makes our operatives more operationally risk-averse.

Leakers aren't only breaking the law and a special trust given to them by the government, they're also breaking ranks with their colleagues - many of whom bravely go in harm's way around the globe.

According to insiders, CIA employees overwhelmingly support the idea of banishing leakers from their midst. There's not a lot of sympathy for dismissed CIA employee Mary McCarthy, who is rumored to be the source of stories alleging that the agency runs secret prisons.

Outrage isn't enough. The government needs to do more. Congress should better define "leaking" in law, while the executive branch should more vigorously hunt down leakers (as ex-CIA Director Porter Goss did) and prosecute them.

Yes, secrecy in the name of national security has to be balanced against the public's right to know. But that balance is precarious, especially during war. Some Americans, especially media and government types, regrettably refuse to take the consequences of their actions into account. Until they get a clue, cracking down is a must.

*Peter Brookes is a Heritage Foundation senior fellow and author of "A Devil's Triangle: Terrorism, WMD and Rogue States."*