

Special Report

NSA Accused of Psychologically Abusing Whistleblowers

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(The following is the first of a two-part series on the National Security Agency's alleged abuse of employee whistleblowers. Part 2 will be published Thursday, Jan. 26, 2006)

(CNSNews.com) - Five current and former National Security Agency (NSA) employees have told Cybercast News Service that the agency frequently retaliates against whistleblowers by falsely labeling them "delusional," "paranoid" or "psychotic."

The intimidation tactics are allegedly used to protect powerful superiors who might be incriminated by damaging information, the whistleblowers say. They also point to a climate of fear that now pervades the agency. Critics warn that because some employees blew the whistle on alleged foreign espionage and criminal activity, the "psychiatric abuse" and subsequent firings are undermining national security.

A spokesman for the NSA declined to comment about the allegations contained in this report.

The accusations of "Soviet-era tactics" are being made by former NSA intelligence analysts and action officers Russell D. Tice, Diane T. Ring, Thomas G. Reinbold, and a former employee who spoke on condition of anonymity. The allegations have been corroborated by a current NSA officer, who also insisted on anonymity, agreeing only to be referenced as "Agent X."

Tice, a former NSA intelligence analyst and action officer, first drew media attention in 2004 after the Pentagon investigated possible retaliation by the NSA against him.

The controversy began in early 2001, when Tice reported that a co-worker at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) appeared to be engaged in espionage for China.

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"I saw all the classic signs," said Tice, who identified the alleged spy to **Cybercast News Service**. The person's identity is not being published in this article for national security reasons.

When Tice transferred to the NSA in November 2002 he continued to report his concerns. At one point, he criticized the FBI, which he labels "the Federal Buffoons and Imbeciles," for the agency's alleged incompetence. One of his emails was forwarded to NSA Security, which prompted the NSA, according to Tice, to order that he undergo a psychiatric evaluation. The NSA psychologist labeled him "paranoid" and "psychotic," Tice told **Cybercast News Service**.

That assessment, which Tice said was made by NSA forensic psychologist Dr. John Michael Schmidt, led to his security clearance being revoked and his firing.

All five whistleblowers name NSA psychologists as central players in what they allege is an ongoing abuse of authority by the NSA's Office of the General Counsel, the NSA Inspector General, the NSA internal security office and psychologists employed by the agency.

Tice's media profile quickly rose again on Jan. 10, when ABC News reported that he had been a source for the December New York Times article about a secret NSA surveillance program that was used to monitor the electronic communications of Americans suspected of contacts with terrorists.

Some leading Democrats charge that President Bush broke the law when he signed the secret order in 2002 authorizing the program, because he bypassed the Foreign Intelligence and Surveillance (FISA) court. The White House contends that the president has sufficient constitutional authority to order such intelligence-gathering, as well as additional powers granted by Congress three days after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Tice furnished **Cybercast News Service** with documents that appear to contradict the NSA's conclusion in his case. The news service verified the contents of the documents with the authors.

A letter dated Nov. 7, 2004, from clinical psychologist Dr. Evelyn Feleppa Adamo indicates that she found "no evidence" of the signs of the alleged mental disorders in Tice. On Oct. 15, 2004, licensed psychologist and family friend Dr. Sandra G. Rosswork wrote a letter indicating that she had never observed any abnormal behavior by Tice and that he was "a solid, responsible, dependable and good natured person" who was "well-liked."

A letter from Employee Assistance Service (EAS) clinical psychologist Dr. William D. Charmak notes that Tice suffered "feelings of humiliation and despair" after losing his security clearance, but did not appear to manifest paranoid symptoms. Charmak did not return a telephone call seeking comment.

An earlier confidential psychological/psychiatric report from an NSA psychologist that Tice knows only as Dr. Bache was dated July 2, 2002 and indicated that "on test results there were no indications of any outstanding difficulties." The report acknowledged that Tice had a "somewhat rigid approach to situations." The NSA declined comment on the findings of any of their psychologists.

In endorsement letters written around the time Tice's security clearance was revoked, five retired NSA and intelligence officials who worked with Tice described him as "enthusiastic," "congenial," "an engaging associate," and a "scholar of high intellectual rigor." Tice was described as possessing "sound judgment," and being well suited to the "most demanding and sensitive intelligence operations." The letters praised him for his "unparalleled professionalism" and "uncommon commitment."

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"This nonsense has to stop. It's like Soviet-era torture," said Tice. "These people are vicious and sadistic. They're destroying the lives of good people, and defrauding the public of good analysts and linguists"

For a long time those who had endured the alleged abuse "were too afraid or ashamed to come forward," Tice added.

Pre-9/11 warning

Among those coming forward is a former NSA linguist who worked with the NSA for almost three decades. The former employee spoke on condition of anonymity as he is currently employed by another federal agency. He is referred in this article simply as "J."

"J" is a "hyperpolyglot" or a person who is fluent in an unusually high number of languages. Former colleagues described him as a brilliant man possessing critical skills that were "amazing."

"I believe the abuse is very widespread," said J. "The targeted person suddenly is described as 'not being a team player,' as 'disgruntled,' and then they're accused of all sorts of bizarre things. Soon they're sent to the psych people."

J first ran afoul of the process when his superiors disagreed with a report he and other agency linguists filed on Sept. 11, 1993. Their study of Arabic language messages and the flow of money out of Saudi Arabia to terrorist entities in other countries led them to conclude that Saudi extremists were plotting to attack America. "You could see, this was the pure rhetoric of Osama bin Laden and his group, the exact same group, and we had an early indication," J said.

"All of us in the group had this view of a burgeoning threat, and suddenly we were all trotted off to the office of security. Then came the call to report for a battery of psychological tests," said J.

J told **Cybercast News Service** that he was again summoned to undergo psychiatric evaluation after warning NSA that security measures should be taken to protect against the possibility that terrorists might try to fly airplanes into buildings.

As an example of what might happen, J said terrorists might try to fly a plane from the nearby Tipton air field in Ft. Meade, Md., into an NSA high-rise building. J said NSA officials described him as "obsessed" with the idea of a "kamikaze" threat due to the time he had spent in Japan. The month was May 2001, four months before the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S.

A similar scenario ensued every time J's analysis countered conventional wisdom, provided a dissenting opinion or made someone feel that their job was being threatened. J said he soon developed an irregular heartbeat due to the stress of not knowing when he next would be called for another psychiatric test.

"I believe it was retaliation, but how do you prove that?" J said. He spent the last 10 years of his career at the NSA with no promotion or raise. During that time, another linguist with critical skills left out of disgust with what was happening, J added.

"Who was going to listen to us?" asked J. "Who could do anything anyway?"

"I'm still afraid they're going to screw my life over," he said. "They have long tentacles. I never even owned a computer because I know what they can do. Every keystroke can be picked up."

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Agent X and the 'underground network'

Agent X, a current NSA officer, confirmed the allegations and told **Cybercast News Service** that psychiatric abuse as a form of retaliation was "commonplace" at the agency.

"A lot of people who work there are going through the same thing. People live in fear here. They run it like some kind of Gestapo," Agent X said.

Those targeted are "yelled at, badgered and abused," X added. "These are really good people, who start to be labeled crazy, but they're telling the truth."

Agent X also alleged that the NSA plants false evidence in personnel files as part of the intimidation campaign.

The agency also maintains a "dirt database" of inconsequential but potentially embarrassing information on employees, gathered during routine clearance investigations, said Tice. The information is kept as a means of leverage, he alleged.

Agent X said that an "underground network" has developed to discuss these issues. "It's like the Nazis have taken over."

Cybercast News Service contacted the NSA on Jan. 17 about the allegations contained in this article, involving the security department, the NSA inspector general, the Office of the General Counsel and staff psychologists such as Schmidt.

Two days later, Don Weber, senior NSA media advisor responded. "At this time I have no information to provide; however, if that changes I will email you soonest. Thanks for the query," Weber stated.

(Part 2 of this series will be published Thursday, Jan. 26, 2006)

Make media inquiries or request an interview with Sherrie Gossett.

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