

## Congressman: charge newspapers over reports on terrorist-tracing program

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WASHINGTON (AP) - The chairman of the House homeland security committee urged the Bush administration on Sunday to seek criminal charges against newspapers that reported on a secret financial-monitoring program used to trace suspected terrorists.

Representative Peter King cited the New York Times in particular for publishing a story last week that said the Treasury Department was working with the CIA to examine messages within a massive international database of money-transfer records.

King, a New York Republican, said he would write Attorney General Alberto Gonzales urging that the country's chief law enforcer "begin an investigation and prosecution of the New York Times - the reporters, the editors and the publisher."

"We're at war, and for the Times to release information about secret operations and methods is treasonous," King told The Associated Press.

A message left Sunday with Times spokeswoman Catherine Mathis was not immediately returned.

King's action was not endorsed by the chairman of the Senate judiciary committee, Republican Senator Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania.

"On the basis of the newspaper article, I think it's premature to call for a prosecution of the New York Times, just like I think it's premature to say that the administration is entirely correct," Specter told Fox News Sunday.

Stories about the money monitoring program also appeared last week in The Wall Street Journal and Los Angeles Times.

King said he thought investigators should examine those publications, but that the greater focus should be on the New York Times because the newspaper in December also disclosed a secret domestic wiretapping program.

He accused the paper of being "more concerned about a left-wing elitist agenda than it is about the security of the American people."

When the paper chose to publish the story, it quoted the executive editor, Bill Keller, as saying editors had listened closely to the government's arguments for withholding the information, but "remain convinced that the administration's extraordinary access to this vast repository of international financial data, however carefully targeted use of it may be, is a matter of public interest."

Lucy Dalglish, executive director of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, said the newspaper acted responsibly, both in last week's report and in reporting last year about the wiretapping program.

"They try to do whatever they can to take into account whatever security concerns the government has and they try to behave responsibly," Dalglish said. "I think in years to come that this is a story American citizens are going to be glad they had, however this plays out."

After the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, Treasury officials obtained access to a vast database called Swift - the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication. The Belgium-based database handles financial message traffic from thousands of financial institutions in more than 200 countries.

Democrats and civil libertarians are questioning whether the program violated privacy rights.

The service, which routes more than 11 million messages each day, mostly captures information on wire transfers and other methods of moving money in and out of the United States, but it does not execute those transfers.

The service generally does not detect private, individual transactions in the United States, such as withdrawals from an ATM or bank deposits. It is aimed mostly at international transfers.

Gonzales said last month that he believes journalists can be prosecuted for publishing classified information, citing an obligation to national security.

He also said the government would not hesitate to track telephone calls made by reporters as part of a criminal leak investigation, but officials would not do so routinely and randomly.

In recent months, journalists have been called into court to testify as part of investigations into leaks, including the unauthorized disclosure of a CIA operative's name.

He said the First Amendment right of a free press should not be absolute when it comes to national security.

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