

NSA whistleblower reveals identity, exposes US government's "architecture of oppression"

By Thomas Gaist
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Former CIA employee Edward Joseph Snowden announced on Sunday that he is the source of recent leaks to the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* exposing systematic police-state surveillance conducted under the Obama administration by the National Security Agency.

Snowden, who is 29 years old and has served as an undercover intelligence employee, referred to the massive surveillance program as an "architecture of oppression" with virtually limitless aims: "They are intent on making every conversation and every form of behaviour in the world known to them."

The leaks have uncovered a government spying program that includes the accumulation of detailed phone records on nearly every individual in the United States, as well as a program of Internet spying spanning the globe involving the close collaboration of major tech companies, including Microsoft and Google.

According to the data released by Snowden, in addition to the collection of data from millions of US citizens on a daily basis, the NSA also snoops on the rest of the world. Employing a program known as Boundless Informant the NSA collected no less than 3 billion pieces of metadata from individuals and businesses across the continent of Europe in the space of just one month. Every European state was subject to surveillance but, on the basis of a color-coded map, it emerges that the continent's biggest economy, Germany, was subject to the most scrutiny by the US program.

The US spying operation has huge international implications. In a commentary on the revelations the British *Financial Times* expressed its concern about the consequences of the US spying for international

diplomacy and business. *Observer* while the condemned the hypocrisy of Obama who recently harshly criticized surveillance operations conducted by the Chinese government.

In an interview with the *Guardian's* Glenn Greenwald (available online here), Snowden detailed the vast spying capabilities assembled by US government agencies: "The NSA has built an infrastructure that allows it to intercept almost everything. With this capability, the vast majority of human communications are automatically ingested without targeting..."

"The NSA specifically targets the communications of everyone... I sitting at my desk certainly had the authority to wiretap anyone, from you or your accountant, to a federal judge or even the president if I had a personal email."

Snowden added, "I don't want to live a society that does these sort of things. I do not want to live in a world where everything I do and say is recorded. That is not something I am willing to support or live under."

Snowden currently works for Booz Allen Hamilton, a defense contractor in Hawaii, but has fled to Hong Kong. Speaking of his motivation in leaking evidence of a massive dragnet carried out under the Obama administration, Snowden added, "Everyone, everywhere now understands how bad things have gotten—and they're talking about it."

Snowden rejected claims that the spying programs are focused on foreign communications: "The NSA routinely lies in response to congressional inquiries about the scope of surveillance in America... We collect more digital communications from America than we do from the Russians."

“We hack everyone everywhere,” he added.

Asked about the possibility of effective countermeasures against the surveillance, Snowden responded, “You are not even aware of what is possible. The extent of their capabilities is horrifying. We can plant bugs in machines. Once you go on the network, I can identify your machine. You will never be safe whatever protections you put in place.”

Snowden said he was motivated by a desire to defend the public against a vast expansion of state power. “Allowing the US government to intimidate its people with threats of retaliation for revealing wrongdoing is contrary to the public interest,” he said. “It’s important to send a message to government that people will not be intimidated.”

Snowden stated that he lives “a very comfortable life,” but is “willing to sacrifice all of that because I can’t in good conscience allow the US government to destroy privacy, Internet freedom and basic liberties for people around the world with this massive surveillance machine they’re secretly building.”

Snowden made clear that he fears for his safety as a result of his actions: “Yes, I could be rendered by the CIA. I could have people come after me. Or any of the third-party partners. They work closely with a number of other nations. Or they could pay off the Triads [organized crime syndicate in China]. Any of their agents or assets,” he said.

Snowden’s fears are entirely justified, given the punishment of whistleblowers meted out by the Obama administration. The US military is currently prosecuting Bradley Manning for releasing to WikiLeaks evidence of massive criminality abroad.

Responding to statements by journalist Steve Clemons that he had overheard intelligence officials arguing that the reporter and leaker of the story should be disappeared, Snowden said: “Well, I am a spy and that is how they talk. Whenever we had a debate in the office on how to handle crimes, they do not defend due process—they defend decisive action. They say it is better to kick someone out of a plane than let these people have a day in court. It is an authoritarian mindset in general.”

Snowden has announced that he will seek protection from foreign governments: “I intend to ask for asylum from any countries that believe in free speech and oppose the victimization of global privacy,” Snowden

told *Washington Post*.

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Obama administration officials have already threatened to arrest and prosecute the leaker of the information on domestic spying. Speaking to NBC, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper said, “This is someone who for whatever reason has chosen to violate a sacred trust for this country... I hope we’re able to track down whoever is doing this.”

In a recent speech, Obama brushed aside media coverage of the surveillance programs as “hype,” saying that systematic spying on telephone records and Internet usage amounted to no more than a “modest encroachment” on rights protected by the US Constitution.

Snowden said he “watched as Obama advanced the very policies that I thought would be reined in [with the departure of the Bush administration],” and as a result, “I got hardened.”

“What they’re doing,” Snowden said, poses “an existential threat to democracy.”

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