

US media blacks out Snowden interview exposing death threats

By Bill Van Auken
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The former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden appeared Sunday night in his first extended television interview. Citing published statements by unnamed US intelligence and military operatives calling for his assassination, he warned that he faces “significant threats” to his life and that US “government officials want to kill me.”

The interview, broadcast by the German television network ARD, was largely blacked out by the US media. The *New York Times* carried not a word of what Snowden said, while the cable and broadcast news programs treated the interview with near total silence.

The American media’s reaction stood in stark contrast to that of both broadcast and print media in Germany, where the interview conducted with Snowden in Russia was treated as a major political event.

The interview itself was preceded by a segment dedicated to Snowden on Germany’s most popular news talk show, with commentary delivered before a sizable live television audience. Those who spoke out in Snowden’s defense received enthusiastic applause, while the defenders of Washington’s spying operations, including a right-wing German journalist and a former US ambassador to Germany, were treated coolly or with outright derision.

Polls conducted in Germany have shown six out of ten surveyed expressing admiration for Snowden, with only 14 percent regarding him as a criminal. The public is evenly divided over whether he should be granted asylum in Germany. Anger over NSA spying on German telephone and Internet communications—including Chancellor Angela Merkel’s personal cell phone—is widespread.

In the interview, Snowden eloquently laid out the core questions of basic democratic rights posed by the

massive NSA spying programs exposed in the documents he has made public.

“Every time you pick up the phone, dial a number, write an email, make a purchase, travel on the bus carrying a cell phone, swipe a card somewhere, you leave a trace and the government has decided that it’s a good idea to collect it all, everything, even if you’ve never been suspected of any crime,” he said.

Snowden went on to note that, while in the past intelligence agencies would identify a suspect through an investigation and then obtain a warrant for surveillance, “Nowadays what we see is they want to apply the totality of their powers in advance—prior to an investigation.”

The former NSA contractor told his interviewer that his “breaking point” in terms of deciding to make the NSA documents public came in March of last year, “seeing the Director of National Intelligence, James Clapper, directly lie under oath to Congress” when he denied the existence of any programs gathering intelligence on millions of Americans. “Beyond that, it was the creeping realization that no one else was going to do this,” he added. “The public had a right to know about these programs. The public had a right to know that which the government is doing in its name, and that which the government is doing against the public.”

While Snowden stuck to his position of allowing journalists to determine what material to make public out of the estimated 1.7 million secret documents he took from the NSA, he did indicate that the agency was spying both on a wide range of German officials as well as carrying out industrial espionage against German corporations.

“If there’s information at Siemens [the German engineering and electronics conglomerate] that they think would be beneficial to the national interests, not

the national security of the United States, they'll go after that information and they'll take it," he said.

Snowden also answered the McCarthyite smears spread by politicians of both major parties and the media in attempting to brand him as a "traitor" or even a Russian spy.

Insisting that he acted alone and neither accepted nor required help from any foreign government, he stated: "If I am a traitor, who did I betray? I gave all of my information to the American public, to American journalists who are reporting on American issues. If they see that as treason I think people really need to consider who do they think they're working for. The public is supposed to be their boss, not their enemy. Beyond that as far as my personal safety, I'll never be fully safe until these systems have changed."

Snowden insisted that what he had done was right, even though the government claims it was a crime, and that what the government is doing is a crime, even though it claims it is legal. He told his interviewer: "I think it's clear that there are times where what is lawful is distinct from what is rightful. There are times throughout history and it doesn't take long for either an American or a German to think about times in the history of their country where the law provided the government to do things which were not right."

He added that, while he would welcome an opportunity to defend himself in open court, the Obama administration had no intention of allowing him to do so. Rather, it has charged him under the Espionage Act, whose terms would preclude his making any case to a jury that his actions were in the interest of the American people. "So it's I would say illustrative that the president would choose to say someone should face the music, when he knows that the music is a show trial," he said.

The near blackout of this interview by the US media is deliberate and highly conscious. From the outset of Snowden's revelations last June, the media has lined up squarely behind the Obama administration, peddling the official lie that the mass domestic surveillance programs are justified by the "war on terror," while joining in the vilification of Snowden as a traitor and possible Russian spy.

Prominent TV announcers like ABC's George Stephanopoulos and NBC's David Gregory have devoted airtime to arguing that not only Snowden, but

even journalists reporting on the documents he has released, like Glenn Greenwald, should be jailed.

This form of "journalism" reflects the class interests of the giant corporations that control the mass media and of the capitalist system as a whole. Its coverage of the NSA revelations themselves has been abysmal, minimizing the significance of the mass domestic spying operations. It is significant that in the face of this media manipulation, Snowden enjoys powerful support within the American public, and hostility to the NSA spying has continued to grow since his revelations.

The media's silencing of the German television interview has another, even more sinister implication. It wants to silence Snowden's warnings about the threats against his life in order to facilitate the work of any death squad formed by the US government to make good on these threats.

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