

The US media and the case of Edward Snowden

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The American media has lined up squarely behind the Obama administration, the National Security Agency (NSA), and the military in defense of the massive spying operations exposed by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden.

Not only has the establishment news media promoted the official propaganda line that wholesale violations of the US Constitution are justified by the requirements of the so-called “war on terror,” it has thrown its support behind the campaign of vilification against Snowden and the international dragnet mounted by the US government to extradite him and convict him on bogus espionage charges.

Prominent news personalities have joined in the agitation against Snowden and gone even further, baiting journalists who are assisting Snowden in his exposures and defending the whistleblower. The complicity of these pseudo-journalists in efforts to criminalize investigative reporting and punish genuine journalists who attempt to do their job—informing the public of official secrets, lies and crimes—underscores the debased state of the American press and its critical role in assault on democratic rights.

On Sunday, George Stephanopoulos, the moderator of ABC News’ “This Week” program, attempted to use an interview with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to discredit both Assange and Snowden. In questioning Assange, who was interviewed remotely from his refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy in London, Stephanopoulos adopted the posture of inquisitor rather than journalist.

A genuine journalist would have used the interview to probe whether other revelations of illegal surveillance would be forthcoming and what they might entail. But Stephanopoulos had no interest in this subject. Like the media as a whole, his main concern was to prevent

further disclosures and avoid an examination of what already has been revealed.

After asking Assange, in effect, to undermine Snowden’s efforts to escape capture by divulging “where Edward Snowden is right now and where he’s expected to go”—which Assange refused to do—the “This Week” host got down to the business of smearing his guest.

“[Edward Snowden’s father] fears that you and WikiLeaks are manipulating his son,” Stephanopoulos declared, adding, “You have put yourself in the middle of it.”

When Assange made the point that the interception of people’s communications under President Obama went far beyond anything attempted by Nixon, Stephanopoulos cut him off and declared, “He [Snowden] has also broken the law.”

He followed with a red herring about alleged attacks by the Ecuadorean regime on journalists, suggesting that by taking refuge in the Ecuadorean embassy Assange was guilty of a “double standard.” When Assange replied that “There is no allegation that Ecuador is involved in a mass transnational surveillance or assassination program,” Stephanopoulos abruptly cut him off and ended the interview.

One week before, David Gregory, the moderator of NBC News’ “Meet the Press” program, grilled Glenn Greenwald, the *Guardian* journalist who has interviewed Snowden and published articles exposing the secret spying programs, based on documents supplied by the whistleblower.

Gregory made little attempt to conceal his hostility, beginning the interview by asking, “Is there additional information he [Snowden] is prepared to leak to bolster his and your claim that he is actually a whistleblower and not a criminal responsible for espionage?”

After continuing in this vein (“You do not dispute that Edward Snowden has broken the law, do you?”), Gregory concluded with: “To the extent that you have aided and abetted Snowden, even in his current movements, why shouldn’t you, Mister Greenwald, be charged with a crime?”

Greenwald shot back, “I think it’s pretty extraordinary that anybody who would call themselves a journalist would muse about whether or not other journalists should be charged with felonies.”

Gregory was not the only prominent media commentator to suggest that Greenwald be imprisoned for breaking the conspiracy of silence surrounding the NSA spying programs. One day after the “Meet the Press” interview, *New York Times* financial columnist Andrew Ross Sorkin, speaking on the CNN “Squawkbox” program, which he co-hosts, declared: “I feel like, A, we’ve screwed this up, even letting him [Snowden] get to Russia. B, clearly the Chinese hate us to even let him out of the country. I would arrest him, and now I would almost arrest Glenn Greenwald, who’s the journalist who seems to want to help him get to Ecuador.”

Who are these “journalists?” They all make seven-figure salaries for promoting the interests of the corporate media owners and the state, and misinforming the American people.

Stephanopoulos leveraged his stint as media spokesman and political advisor to President Clinton in the 1990s to land lucrative jobs at ABC, which is owned by Walt Disney Company. His establishment credentials include membership on the semi-official Council on Foreign Relations.

Gregory boosted his career prospects as a young reporter by establishing close relations with the Bush White House following the theft of the 2000 election. The right-wing Media Research Center named him “Best White House Correspondent” for his coverage of Bush’s first 100 days.

Sorkin is known as an apologist for the most corrupt elements on Wall Street. The son of a partner in a high-powered New York City law firm that specializes in mergers and acquisitions, he became a financial reporter for the *Times* and quickly rose to become financial columnist and editor of the newspaper’s *Dealbook*, which the *Times* describes as “a dynamic new way for Wall Street power players to get the news

they need to compete in today’s tough marketplace.”

In November of 2008, at the height of the crisis of General Motors and Chrysler, he published a column calling for Chapter 11 bankruptcy and denouncing the “gold-plated” and “off-the-charts” wages and benefits of auto workers. He singled out for attack remarks made by an assembler at GM’s Lake Orion, Michigan plant, which had been published in the *Detroit Free Press*. The worker had told the newspaper, “I think we’ve given enough.”

These wealthy, complacent and reactionary figures are representative of the upper rungs of the media. They are devoid of democratic consciousness, hostile to the working masses and slavishly loyal to the ruling elite and the state. They exemplify a media that serves as an arm of the state and considers that to be its legitimate mission.



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