

Father of Edward Snowden issues open letter to Obama denouncing “Orwellian surveillance programs”

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Lon Snowden, father of Edward Snowden, has written an open letter to President Barack Obama denouncing the NSA surveillance programs exposed by his son and the Obama administration’s international witch-hunt in response to the disclosures.

The letter, dated July 26, 2013, was written together with Lon Snowden’s lawyer, Bruce Fein.

In the letter, Snowden compares the NSA surveillance programs to the Fugitive Slave Act and the Jim Crow laws in the American South and writes that the United States has lessons to learn from “the dynamics of the Third Reich.” The letter further compares the present situation to the post-World War II Nuremberg trials “in which ‘following orders’ was rejected as a defense.”

It comes amid new revelations concerning the expansive scope of the programs. In an interview on ABC News’ “This Week” program on Sunday, *Guardian* journalist Glenn Greenwald commented: “The NSA has trillions of telephone calls and emails in their databases that they’ve collected over the last several years.”

Greenwald described the programs used by the NSA, saying “all an analyst has to do is enter an email address or an IP address, and it does two things.” He continued: “It searches that database and lets them listen to the calls or read the emails of everything that the NSA has stored, or look at the browsing histories or Google search terms that you’ve entered, and it also alerts them to any further activity that people connected to that email address or that IP address do in the future.”

“It’s all done with no need to go to a court, with no need to even get supervisor approval on the part of the

analyst,” he continued. Greenwald said he will be coming forward with evidence of the extensive access to surveillance data given to low-level analysts.

In their open letter, Lon Snowden and Fein accuse the Obama administration of using secrecy to block public awareness and discussion of its “Orwellian surveillance programs.” They assert that a “commanding majority” of the American people “now voice concerns over the dragnet surveillance of Americans that Edward exposed and you concealed.”

The authors argue that Snowden’s actions flow from a long tradition of civil disobedience against tyranny, writing that “the history of liberty is a history of civil disobedience to unjust laws or practices.” They quote Thoreau on the moral duty to break the law when the law becomes an instrument of injustice: “If the injustice... is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.”

Fein and Snowden place the persecution of Snowden in the context of the historical crimes of the American ruling elite, pointing to the imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II. They write: “A dark chapter in America’s World War II history would not have been written if the then-United States attorney general had resigned rather than participate in racist concentration camps imprisoning 120,000 Japanese American citizens and resident aliens.”

They argue that Edward Snowden was motivated by his belief that the “secret, indiscriminate spying on millions of innocent citizens” in which he was involved violated the First and Fourth Amendments. Seeing that “members of Congress entrusted with oversight

remained silent or Delphic,” Snowden “confronted a choice between civic duty and passivity.”

Fein and Snowden condemn the Obama administration’s response to the leaks. “We thus find your administration’s zeal to punish Mr. Snowden’s discharge of civic duty to protect democratic processes and to safeguard liberty to be unconscionable and indefensible.”

“We are also appalled at your administration’s scorn for due process, the rule of law, fairness, and the presumption of innocence as regards Edward,” they add.

The letter also indicts Congress, accusing “prominent Democrats and Republicans in the House and Senate” of violating the presumption of innocence by branding Edward Snowden as a traitor immediately after the documents were leaked, including “House Speaker John Boehner, Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi, Congresswoman Michele Bachmann and Senator Dianne Feinstein.”

The letter concludes by calling on Obama to dismiss the charges against Snowden and support legislation “to remedy the NSA surveillance abuses he revealed.” As Obama has made clear, however, he has no intention of doing either of these things.



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