

# Friedman of the Times demands Edward Snowden turn himself in

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Edward Snowden has been the target of a series of virulent attacks by the US media for exposing the massive spying operations of the National Security Agency against the American people and the entire world's population. An array of well-heeled talking heads and columnists has joined in echoing the line of the Obama administration and the US political establishment that wholesale spying and the shredding of core democratic and constitutional rights are justified by the "war on terror" and the defense of "national security."

Particularly vile and hypocritical examples of this form of state propaganda journalism have predictably been supplied by Thomas Friedman, the chief commentator on foreign affairs for the *New York Times*.

Friedman's latest column, which appeared in the August 14 edition of the *Times*, was devoted in large measure to a vilification of Russian President Vladimir Putin for offenses ranging from hindering US operations in Syria to "blatant use of rule-by-law tactics to silence any critics"—something the *Times* columnist has no problem with when it is carried out by the Obama administration.

In regards to Snowden, Friedman writes: "Considering the breadth of reforms that President Obama is now proposing to prevent privacy abuses in intelligence gathering, in the wake of Snowden's disclosures, Snowden deserves a chance to make a second impression — that he truly is a whistle-blower, not a traitor. The fact is, he dumped his data and fled to countries that are hostile to us and to the very principles he espoused. To make a second impression, Snowden would need to come home, make his case and face his accusers. It would mean risking a lengthy jail term, but also trusting the fair-mindedness of the American people, who, I believe, will not allow an authentic

whistle-blower to be unfairly punished."

It is hard to imagine how anyone could string together a greater amount of lies, distortions and sheer nonsense in a single paragraph.

First there is the pretense that in light of Obama's sweeping "reforms" to the NSA spying operations, Snowden "deserves a chance to make a second impression."

What NSA reforms? The Obama administration's actions consist of a brief presidential statement last Friday assuring the American public that it has nothing to fear from a secret spying dragnet sweeping up all phone calls, emails and Internet communications. This was combined with the issuance of a 22-page white paper that provided a pseudo-legal rationale for wholesale violations of the Fourth Amendment's guarantees against unreasonable search and seizure. The document was in the loathsome tradition of similar rationales issued in defense of torture and drone assassinations.

As for a "second impression," it is not Snowden that is in need of refurbishing his image, but rather the administration, the military-intelligence apparatus and their apologists like Friedman. Poll after poll has shown a solid majority supporting the former NSA contractor's actions while—despite the relentless propaganda campaign against him—barely a third of the public buys the government's story that he is a spy and a traitor.

As for Friedman's claim that it is a "fact" that Snowden "dumped his data and fled to countries that are hostile to us and to the very principles he espoused," this is nothing but willful distortion and malicious slander.

Snowden didn't "dump" data. He provided information exposing the existence of illegal and

unconstitutional programs involving massive and pervasive surveillance that had been previously kept secret from the people of the US and the world.

As for fleeing to “countries that are hostile to us and the very principles he espoused,” Snowden’s choice of a safe haven was reduced to Russia by Washington’s yanking of his passport, stranding him in Moscow’s international airport, and then waging an international campaign of gangsterism and intimidation to prevent any other country on the planet from granting his right to political asylum.

The core of Friedman’s argument is that in order to redeem himself—in the eyes of state apologists like Friedman himself, one assumes—Snowden should turn himself in to US authorities and risk “a lengthy jail term” based on faith in the “fair-mindedness” of the American people, who would “not allow an authentic whistle-blower to be unfairly punished.”

But the policies of Washington, from wars of aggression abroad, to wholesale spying at home, to the protracted imprisonment and torture of innocent detainees at Guantanamo, are a demonstration of the complete contempt of the US ruling establishment for the “fair-mindedness” and democratic values of the American people.

The idea that such principles determine the fate of whistle-blowers like Snowden is not merely laughable, but obscene. Friedman’s column appeared just two weeks after the conviction of Bradley Manning in a military court martial for the “crime” of bringing to the light of day war crimes carried out by the US government. After being imprisoned under conditions tantamount to torture, Manning is now threatened with a sentence that could keep him behind bars for his entire life. There is no doubt that if he fell into the hands of US authorities, Snowden, who is being prosecuted under the Espionage Act on charges that carry the death penalty, would face the same fate or worse.

Why doesn’t Friedman give his buddies in the White House the same advice he gave Snowden? Why not tell Obama, Bush, Cheney and others to “make their case and face their accusers” for violations of international law and crimes against humanity ranging from wars of aggression, to torture and assassinations? The answer is simple. Friedman is himself deeply implicated in all of these crimes, for which he has served as a well-paid

apologist and propagandist.

It is worth noting that while Friedman is now urging Snowden to entrust his fate to the supposed democratic guarantees of the US judicial system, just last June in a column denouncing the former NSA contractor, the *Times* columnist advanced the perverse argument that it was necessary to accept the secret domestic spying programs in order to prevent even more dictatorial measures. According to Friedman’s argument, such surveillance is necessary to prevent another major terrorist attack on US soil, which he warned would “lead to the end of the open society as we know it.”

This was followed a week later by another column by former *Times* executive editor Bill Keller, frankly titled “Living With the Surveillance State.” He similarly warned that the response to another terrorist action in the US would be to “ratchet up the security state, even beyond the war-on-terror excesses that followed the last big attack.”

In the final analysis, multimillionaire “journalists” like Friedman and Keller are willing to accept not only wholesale domestic spying, but also the “excesses” of a police state dictatorship, out of fear not of terrorism, but rather of the conditions of social inequality and deprivation for millions at home giving rise to social explosions that would endanger their wealth and privilege.

The chilling assessment that they give of the fragility of what remains of democratic rights and processes in America is an accurate one that constitutes a powerful argument for the need to defend Edward Snowden against the manhunt mounted by the US government to capture him.



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