

Actor Matt Damon defends whistle-blower Edward Snowden

David Walsh
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Matt Damon, one of the most popular film actors currently working, told a BBC television host last week that he supported the actions of Edward Snowden, the whistle-blower who has lifted the lid on the criminal activities of the National Security Agency (NSA).

Damon, who has received three Academy Award nominations, five Golden Globe nominations and five Screen Actors Guild Awards nominations, told Husam Asi, host of the BBC Arabic television show “Alternative Cinema” [Cinema Badila], that Snowden had done “a great thing.” The clip was posted on YouTube August 22, and the entire interview aired on “Alternative Cinema” two days later.

Asi asked Damon, “Would you do what Snowden did?”

Damon replied, “I don’t know, I haven’t read everything that he’s leaked. But he certainly seems like a very conscientious guy—these revelations are pretty incredible and pretty shocking, and kind of fly in the face of the public statements that all these officials have made.”

“On balance,” the actor continued, “I think it’s a great thing that he did. If we’re going to trade our civil liberties for our security, then that should be a decision that we collectively make. It shouldn’t be made for us.”

Damon’s statement of support for Snowden, now living in Russia, takes a certain amount of courage, considering the large-scale government and media campaign to discredit the whistle-blower, along with others who have exposed US government crimes, such as Julian Assange and Bradley Manning.

Despite those efforts, polls indicate that a majority of the population supports Snowden and rejects the official characterizations.

Coincidentally, Arizona Republican Senator John

McCain earlier this month complained on Fox News that Snowden was viewed by the younger generation as “some kind of Jason Bourne.” The Bourne character (created by Robert Ludlum), an intelligence operative who becomes the target of assassination attempts after he learns of illegal government activities, was played by Damon in three films. McCain went on, “There’s kind of a generation change here. Young Americans don’t trust this government.” In various polls, young people have expressed strong sympathies for Snowden’s revelations.

Earlier this month, Damon told BET (Black Entertainment Television) that Obama “broke up with me.” He continued: “There are a lot of things that I really question: the legality of the drone strikes and these NSA revelations. Jimmy Carter came out and said ‘we don’t live in a democracy.’ That’s a little intense when an ex-president says that, so he’s got some explaining to do, particularly for a constitutional law professor.” Speaking of the president, Damon said, “We no longer see eye-to-eye.”

On August 12, veteran director Oliver Stone (*Platoon*, *Wall Street*, *JFK*) told journalists gathered at the Foreign Correspondents Club of Japan in Tokyo that Obama “is a snake.” He added, “We have to turn on him.” Stone suggested that the NSA surveillance programs did more to suppress protests rather than catch terrorists, pointing to the Boston Marathon bombings as an example.

Stone, who was in Japan to promote his television series *The Untold History of the United States*, commented, “The Boston Marathon, they were so busy tracking down potential protestors... that they missed the bombers. It’s never about terrorists. It always becomes about the way J. Edgar Hoover did it; he brought all the weight of government to bear against protestors.”

During a film festival appearance in the Czech Republic in July, Stone called Snowden a “hero” and the NSA programs a “disgrace.” The former NSA contractor, the filmmaker said, “revealed secrets that we should all know, that the United States has repeatedly violated the Fourth Amendment.”



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