

# Snowden defends his exposure of NSA's mass spying in online chat

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NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden answered questions online Thursday posted by an audience via Twitter. The questions ranged from the openly hostile to expressions of genuine concern for Snowden's safety and interest in his views on privacy and freedom. In all of his answers, Snowden demonstrated a high level of political principle and considerable courage.

Having obtained temporary asylum in Russia, Snowden expressed his desire to return to the US, but said it was not possible, because he had no protection under whistleblower statutes, and because he was being charged under the 1917 Espionage Act "which was never intended to be used against people working in the public interest, and forbids a public interest defense."

He added, "This is especially frustrating, because it means there's no chance to have a fair trial, and no way I can come home and make my case to a jury."

Noting the media reports Thursday that the government's own Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board had vindicated his exposures, finding that the NSA's Prism meta-data domestic spying program was unconstitutional and had done nothing to detect terrorism Snowden commented:

"When even the federal government says the NSA violated the constitution at least 120 million times under a single program, but failed to discover even a single plot, it's time to end 'bulk collection,' which is a euphemism for mass surveillance. There is simply no justification for continuing an unconstitutional policy with a 0% success rate."

Since he made his first revelations of a vast and unconstitutional spying operation by the NSA last summer, Snowden has become an international symbol of the struggle in defense of democratic rights.

A recent Quinnipiac poll found that 57 percent of Americans consider Snowden a whistleblower, with

that figure increasing to 77 percent among 18-29 year olds. Despite a relentless barrage of smears and slanders from pundits and politicians of both major political parties, only 34 percent of respondents in the Quinnipiac poll agreed with the official narrative branding him a traitor.

Snowden has earned the ire of the entire US political establishment, including the so-called critics of the NSA's spying. He has exposed the US government as a virtually omnipresent prying eye, storing phone records on millions of American citizens, examining their credit card records, emails, text messages and license plate information. The NSA has amassed enough personal information on Americans to be able to round up political opponents when the need arises.

The political representatives of the American ruling class have gone to great pains to control the damage of Snowden's revelations. A more recent spate of attacks on Snowden include the slander by leading congressional Republicans and Democrats that he was working with the Russian government, an accusation that he strongly refuted in an interview with the *New Yorker* magazine last week.

Snowden told the *New Yorker* that he, "clearly and unambiguously acted alone, with no assistance from anyone, much less a government." Snowden added that the allegation, "won't stick ... because it's clearly false, and the American people are smarter than politicians think they are."

"We don't know if he had help from aliens," Snowden told his interviewer, mocking the servility and credulousness of the mainstream media, an essential ally in the campaign against him.

Snowden used the *New Yorker* interview and Thursday's online chat session to reiterate his opposition to unconstitutional spying, saying in both

that he had no regrets about his revelations.

One questioner Thursday asked him whether he was in fear for his life. His response displayed considerable insight, not to mention selflessness:

“It’s concerning, to me, but primarily for reasons you might not expect. That current, serving officials of our government are so comfortable in their authorities that they’re willing to tell reporters on the record that they think the due process protections of the 5th Amendment of our Constitution are outdated concepts. These are the same officials telling us to trust that they’ll honor the 4th and 1st Amendments. This should bother all of us. The fact that it’s also a direct threat to my life is something I am aware of, but I’m not going to be intimidated. Doing the right thing means having no regrets.”

Some of Snowden’s remarks were both eloquent and insightful, for example, on striking a “balance” between privacy and spying he wrote:

“Fundamentally, a society in which the pervasive monitoring of the sum of civil activity becomes routine is turning from the traditions of liberty toward what is an inherently illiberal infrastructure of preemptive investigation, a sort of quantified state where the least of actions are measured for propriety.”

And in response to an earlier question about the “appropriate extent” of spying by the US intelligence apparatus:

“I think a person should be able to dial a number, make a purchase, send an SMS, write an email, or visit a website without having to think about what it’s going to look like on their permanent record.”

The WSWS unequivocally defends Edward Snowden. His revelations have helped to tear the mask off of a burgeoning police state apparatus.

Several of Snowden’s answers also expressed illusions in the capacity of the present big business-controlled political system to reform itself under pressure from the population.

Nonetheless, that he continues to stand firm under the enormous weight of official condemnation, up to and including threats of assassination, is an expression of the deeply-held democratic convictions of working people in the US and around the world. What the ruling class fears is not only what Snowden has and will reveal, but also what his actions will inspire among this broader population.



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