

Polk Awards honor Greenwald, other journalists who broke Snowden revelations

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In the midst of an international campaign of threats and vilification directed against US National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden, four journalists who reported on the NSA's surveillance programs have won a prestigious journalism award.

Three reporters for the British *Guardian* newspaper—Glenn Greenwald, Ewen MacAskill and Laura Poitras—as well as Barton Gellman of the *Washington Post*, are to receive the Polk Award for national security reporting. The award is in recognition of stories they wrote based on documents leaked by Snowden. Thirty journalists in 13 categories will receive the 2013 awards, which will be given out on April 11.

The George Polk Awards were established in 1949 by Long Island University in New York to recognize special achievements in journalism. They honor George Polk, a CBS correspondent killed during his coverage of the Greek civil war. Past honorees include CBS Anchorman Walter Cronkite and *Washington Post* reporter Carl Bernstein.

“In the tradition of George Polk, many of the journalists we have recognized did more than report news,” said John Darnton, curator of the awards, in a press release. “They heightened public awareness with perceptive detection and dogged pursuit of stories that otherwise would not have seen the light of day. Repercussions of the NSA stories in particular will be with us for years to come.”

The press release noted that the reporters published material “describing how the NSA gathered information on untold millions of unsuspecting—and unsuspected—Americans, plugged into the communications links of major Internet companies and coerced companies like Yahoo and Google into turning over data about their customers.”

Long Island University singled out Greenwald's June 5, 2013 story reporting that the NSA was collecting phone records of millions of Americans for special mention. It was the first exposure based on documents supplied by Snowden of the US government's vast illegal spying program. The university also cited Gellman's June 7, 2013 report exposing the FBI's PRISM program that monitors traffic on Internet service providers, including Skype, Microsoft, Google and Yahoo.

In late May 2013 Greenwald, MacAskill and Poitras traveled to Hong Kong to meet Snowden. Poitras, an award winning documentary filmmaker, recorded the *Guardian* interview in Hong Kong in which Snowden revealed his identity.

The bestowing of the Polk Awards is in part a reflection of the widespread public sentiment in favor of Snowden, especially among young people. Among those between the ages of eighteen and thirty, 57 percent support Snowden's actions while only 35 percent oppose them.

However, the most striking thing about the announcement of the 2013 Polk Awards is the contrast between this honor to Greenwald, Poitras and the others, and the vicious attacks on these journalists in official Washington and media circles. The awards have been barely noted by major media outlets and their significance has not been analyzed. This is because the honoring of Greenwald and others cuts across the official attempts to brand Snowden a “traitor” and those who reported on his revelations as his “accomplices.”

There have been calls in the British Parliament for prosecution of the *Guardian*. It was recently revealed that last July the British government threatened to jail *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger and close the

newspaper for its coverage of the Snowden leaks. In August the British authorities detained David Miranda, the partner of Greenwald, who was held for almost nine hours under provisions of the UK Terrorism Act 2000 and had his laptop computer and other personal items seized.

Democratic and Republican politicians have joined together to call for Greenwald's prosecution. The head of the US House Intelligence Committee recently suggested that journalists who received and published documents from Snowden were guilty of criminal acts. In a public hearing committee chair Mike Rogers compared Greenwald to a thief. "If I'm hocking stolen classified material that I'm not legally in possession of for personal gain and profit, is that not a crime?" he declared.

Meanwhile, threats are mounting against Snowden, who has sought temporary asylum in Russia. The *Buzzfeed* web site recently carried several posted death threats against the former NSA analyst. One unnamed military officer outlined a scenario in which Snowden would be poked by a passerby with a poison umbrella tip and go home where he "dies in the shower." An anonymous NSA analyst was quoted as saying, "In a world where I would not be restricted on killing an American, I personally would go kill him myself." Given the record of the Obama administration in carrying out extra-judicial killings, these threats should be taken seriously.

The Obama administration has filed charges against Snowden under the Espionage Act of 1917. Two of the counts carry the death penalty. Meanwhile, Bradley (Chelsea) Manning is serving a 35-year prison sentence for exposing US war crimes.

For its part the European Parliament last week killed an amendment calling for Snowden to be granted asylum in Europe and opposing "his prosecution, extradition or rendition by third parties."

As for the US corporate media, its attitude to democratic rights was summed up last August in a Twitter message sent by *Time* magazine senior national correspondent Michael Grunwald. Referring to Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks who is currently trapped in the Ecuadorean embassy in London, Grunwald called for his assassination by the US government. "I can't wait to write a defense of the drone strike that takes out Julian Assange," he wrote.

Grunwald's remarks were not an aberration. He supported the police military lockdown of Boston in an article published last April. In the course of the piece he defended the state assassination of an American citizen in Yemen, Anwar Al-Awlaki, by the Obama administration. He continued, "I guess you could call me a statist. Our rights are not inviolate...The civil liberties purists of the ACLU are just as extreme as the gun purists of the NRA..."

The official reaction to the Snowden revelations of massive US government spying underscores there is no support for the defense of democratic rights within the corporate elite. The defense of basic rights such as press freedom and freedom of speech falls to the working class, which must organize as a political force independently of all factions of the political establishment.



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