

Edward Snowden defends decision to reveal NSA spying in NBC interview

Joseph Kishore
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NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden provided a clear and articulate defense of his actions in an interview with NBC News on Wednesday. In his first television interview with the American media, Snowden denounced the criminal activities of the American government, saying, “The Constitution of the United States had been violated on a massive scale.”

It is now nearly one year since the first of Snowden’s revelations was made public in a June 5, 2013 article in the *Guardian*. Since then, Snowden has been hounded by the US government, forced into exile in Russia, vilified as a traitor, charged with violations of the Espionage Act, and threatened with violence or death.

Typical of the lying of the Obama administration were statements Wednesday from US Secretary of State John Kerry, repeated in different forms by various government officials on Thursday. Kerry denounced the whistleblower as a “traitor” and called him a “coward” for not coming back to the US to face a show trial for the public service he has carried out. Snowden’s defense of his actions was, the head of the State Department declared in prose equal to the power of his arguments, “dumb.”

Snowden has maintained a principled stand throughout this yearlong campaign of threats and calumny. His ability to do so is a reflection not only of personal courage, but also the widespread popular support he continues to have. Despite their best efforts, the Obama administration and its accomplices in the media and other governments have failed to shift public opinion.

What Snowden has revealed in a series of leaks is the very advanced framework of a police state, both illegal and unconstitutional. The National Security Agency (NSA) and the US spy network are engaged in the collection of virtually all communications and the assembling of vast databases for the purpose of monitoring the personal, social and political activities of the entire population.

While attacking Snowden, the Obama administration and the NSA have sought to cover up their own crimes with lies, including the claim that American citizens are not spied on

indiscriminately.

“Now all of our data can be collected without any suspicion of wrongdoing on our part, without any underlying justification,” Snowden said in the interview, refuting these claims. “All of your private records, all of your private communications, all of your transactions, all of your associations, who you talk to, who you love, what you buy, what you read—all of those things can be seized and held by the government and then searched later for any reason, hardly, without any justification, without any real oversight, without any real accountability for those who do wrong.”

Snowden added, “Now we have a system of pervasive pre-criminal surveillance, where the government wants to watch what you’re doing just to see what you’re up to, to see what you’re thinking even behind closed doors.” He described the ability of the state, on the basis of knowing the pattern of phone calls, to construct a “pattern of life” for anyone it wants.

With monitoring software that can be installed on a target’s computer, spy agencies can “actually see you write sentences and then backspace over your mistakes and then change the words and then kind of pause and think about what you wanted to say and then change it. And it’s this extraordinary intrusion not just into your communications, your finished messages but your actual drafting process, into the way you think.”

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted in an early statement calling for the mobilization of popular support in his defense, the life experience of the 30-year-old Snowden reflects that of an entire generation—an experience that Snowden recounted again in his NBC interview. The disaffection with and growing opposition to the existing social and political set-up reflected in the evolution of Snowden’s views is not simply an individual process, but part of a change involving millions of his generation. It is this fact that accounts for the extraordinary level of anger and fear within the state apparatus that has been generated by his actions.

Saying that he originally bought into the government’s

response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and its claims about the Iraq war, Snowden explained that as he “rose to higher and higher levels in the intelligence communities, I gained more and more access, as I saw more and more classified information, at the highest levels, I realized that so many of the things that were told by the government simply aren’t true. Much like the arguments about aluminum tubes and weapons of mass destruction in Iraq... The Iraq War that I signed up for was launched on false premises. The American people were misled.”

Snowden also replied to statements from the Obama administration that he should return to the US and “face the music,” as Kerry put it Wednesday. The secretary of state told the *Today Show* that Snowden should “come back and make his case... He should trust in the American system of justice.”

The charges that he faces under the Espionage act, Snowden noted, provide “no chance to make a public defense.” He continued: “You can’t argue to the jury that what you did was in the public interest... You are not allowed to argue based on all the evidence in your favor because that evidence may be classified, even if it’s exculpatory... [It] is not an open court and a fair trial.”

The real character of the “American system of justice” is evident in the treatment of Bradley (Chelsea) Manning, who was held in solitary confinement and tortured and is now serving a 35-year prison sentence.

Responding to claims from the Obama administration that he should have gone through “proper channels” rather than exposing illegal government programs directly to the population, Snowden said that he had, in fact, attempted to raise his concerns within the NSA itself. “The NSA has records,” he said. “They have copies of emails right now to their Office of General Counsel, to their oversight and compliance folks, from me raising concerns about the NSA’s interpretations of its legal authorities.”

The response of the agency “more or less, in bureaucratic language, was you should stop asking questions,” Snowden said. The NSA released one email from Snowden on Thursday, which it has evidently been concealing for a year, while claiming it had no further evidence that Snowden had raised concerns.

All intelligence operatives who have raised objections to illegal programs in the past (including Thomas Drake, William Binney, Kirk Wiebe, John Kiriakou, Manning and others) have been victimized, hounded, threatened and prosecuted. “We’ve seen more charges under the Espionage Act in the last administration than we have in all other administrations in American history,” Snowden noted.

As for the Obama administration’s denunciation of Snowden for going to “authoritarian” Russia (an

extraordinary statement given the nature of the programs Snowden has revealed), the whistleblower replied: “The reality is, I never intended to end up in Russia. I had a flight booked to Cuba, onwards to Latin America, and I was stopped because the United States government decided to revoke my passport and trap me in Moscow Airport.”

The Obama administration and its European allies went so far as to force down a plane carrying the Bolivian president on suspicions that Snowden might have been on board.

There are indications that Snowden may be seeking to make an arrangement with the American government to allow him to return to the US. His lawyers have been in discussions with the Obama administration over a possible plea bargain.

Snowden should be warned against placing any trust in promises from the US government. The intelligence agencies and the state as a whole are furious over Snowden’s actions, and are determined to make an example of him. They are fearful of other Snowdens who may be encouraged by his actions.

In the course of his interview, Snowden evinced a lack of understanding as to the social and political forces he confronts. This came out, for example, when he cited the NSA “reforms” pushed by the Obama administration and Congress as a significant mark of progress. These measures are, in fact, aimed at ensuring that the mass spying programs continue, with a fig leaf of legality and congressional sanction.

Snowden also said the spying programs he has revealed represented an “overreach” in response to the events of September 11, 2001. But the illegal monitoring of the population is not a mistaken response to terrorist attacks. It is rather a deliberate subversion of constitutional and democratic rights by a corporate and financial elite that senses and fears mass discontent churning beneath the surface of American life. The spying is directed at all social and political opposition to the policies of a ruling class steeped in criminality.

The vicious and enraged response of the political establishment to Snowden’s revelations is an expression of these same social interests. Once again, it must be stressed that the defense of Snowden, and opposition to the police-state spying apparatus he has helped reveal, must be connected to the independent political mobilization of the working class, in the United States and internationally.



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