

# Edward Snowden lends his support to “USA Freedom Act”

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Edward Snowden, who in 2013 provided the world with definitive evidence that the US government was illegally spying on effectively all US and global telecommunications, has come out in print praising the so-called USA Freedom Act. The law provides a series of cosmetic “reforms” to the US government’s illegal domestic spying program, while in fact systematizing and expanding illegal government surveillance.

In an op-ed column published Monday in the *New York Times*, Snowden declared “Ending the mass surveillance of private phone calls under the Patriot Act is a historic victory for the rights of every citizen.”

The US media has sought to portray the USA Freedom Act as a major reform aimed at ending mass surveillance by the National Security Agency.

Snowden’s column echoed the line of the *Times* itself, which declared that the passage of the bill represented a vindication for Snowden and popular opposition to domestic spying. The *Times* declared, “The shift against the security state began with the revelation by Edward J. Snowden, a former National Security Agency contractor, about the bulk collection of phone records.”

In reality, as the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote after the bill’s passage, “The bill—which has received the endorsement of the Obama administration and war criminals such as CIA Director John Brennan—is not an effort to curtail the vast and illegal activities of the US intelligence agency, but rather a means of ensuring that these activities can continue, now with a pseudo-legal foundation that has been explicitly endorsed by Congress.”

It has not taken very long for this assessment to be confirmed. Even in the corporate-controlled press, there is a growing understanding that the bill does not end mass warrantless wiretapping, but rather serves as a

legal framework for continuing and facilitating it.

Writing in the *Washington Post* Thursday, Dickinson College political science professor H.L. Pohlman declared, “USA Freedom Act might actually broaden the government’s program of collecting and analyzing telephone metadata,” adding that “the American people will be left in the dark about whether the government is analyzing international and domestic telephone metadata more, not less, than it did before its passage.”

The basic error in Snowden’s column in the *Times* is to equate the genuine outrage felt by millions of people over the systematic violations of their democratic rights by the US government with the government’s efforts to subdue, stifle and disorient that opposition while continuing illegal domestic surveillance.

Snowden writes, “Privately, there were moments when I worried that [he and the journalists he worked with] might have put our privileged lives at risk for nothing—that the public would react with indifference, or practiced cynicism, to the revelations. Never have I been so grateful to have been so wrong.”

He continues, “Two years on, the difference is profound... After a White House-appointed oversight board investigation found that this program had not stopped a single terrorist attack, even the president who once defended its propriety and criticized its disclosure has now ordered it terminated.”

The actions of the Obama administration, however, are aimed not at restricting or stopping illegal government surveillance, but rather at bamboozling the public into believing that the government has stopped spying on them.

The *Times* plays a major role in this effort to delude the American people. There is no doubt that the newspaper’s editors solicited the Snowden column and approved its content. They hope that Snowden’s

popular support, due to his personal courage in exposing illegal government surveillance, will give some credibility to the claim that the beast that is the American military-intelligence apparatus has somehow been tamed.

In fact, Snowden's assessment of the USA Freedom Act is contradicted by later observations in his own column. Snowden points to the growing escalation of domestic spying around the world, declaring, "Spymasters in Australia, Canada and France have exploited recent tragedies to seek intrusive new powers despite evidence such programs would not have prevented attacks," and adding that "at the turning of the millennium, few imagined that citizens of developed democracies would soon be required to defend the concept of an open society against their own leaders."

It is politically naive, to say the least, for Snowden to assume that this trend prevails throughout the world, but not in the United States, the center of global reaction, which has pioneered the methods of domestic surveillance, torture and extrajudicial assassination that other "democratic" governments are now belatedly adopting.

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Snowden is currently living in Russia, which has granted him temporary asylum following attempts by the Obama administration to extradite him to the US, where he would likely face either an unfair trial or illegal detention, torture, or even murder.

While in Russia, Snowden has faced death threats from forces within the US government. In January 2014, Snowden declared in an interview, "These people, and they are government officials, have said they would love to put a bullet in my head or poison me when I come out of the supermarket, and then watch as I die in the shower."

Snowden was referring to the scenario detailed by an unnamed military officer who told *Buzzfeed*, "I think if we had the chance, we would end it very quickly," the officer said. "Just casually walking on the streets of Moscow...he is casually poked by a passerby... He goes home very innocently and next thing you know he dies in the shower."

Whether Snowden understands it or not, his column represents a concession to the wolves who have been

plotting his prosecution and assassination for two years.

While unequivocally supporting Snowden against efforts by the US government to fraudulently extradite and convict him, the *World Socialist Web Site* takes a critical approach to Snowden's political views. Snowden has repeatedly stated his belief that the US political establishment can be reformed from within and is ultimately susceptible to popular pressure.

This has left him vulnerable to being manipulated and used by the very forces whose machinations he exposed before the public, who not too long ago were revealed to be plotting his murder.

Snowden fails to see the social interests behind the US government's spying programs and the ruthlessness with which they have been pursued. The attack on democratic rights, far from being simply a policy decision made by the government, which can be amended as a result of popular pressure, is a social necessity for the ruling elite. The ongoing and continuous attack on democratic rights flows inevitably from the capitalist system and the ever-greater social inequality it engenders.



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