

# Trump's suggestion of a pardon for Edward Snowden meets US intelligence community backlash

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19 August 2020

Several recent comments by President Donald Trump that he is interested in taking a “good look at” pardoning the former National Security Agency (NSA) contractor Edward Snowden have prompted vociferous denunciations from the US intelligence community, leading Democrats and Republicans and the corporate media.

Democrats and Republicans with close ties to the intelligence agencies have launched a campaign of opposition after the president said he would look into the case of the former NSA contractor who exposed illegal mass surveillance.

During a news conference on Saturday from his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, the President told reporters, “There are many, many people—it seems to be a split decision—many people think that he [Snowden] should be somehow be treated differently and other people think he did very bad things. I’m going to take a very good look at it.”

These statements on the weekend were a follow up to comments Trump made to the *New York Post* in an interview published on Thursday. In that interview, Trump said, “There are a lot of people that think that [Snowden] is not being treated fairly. I mean, I hear that.” The President went on to tell the *Post*, “I guess the DOJ is looking to extradite him right now? ... It’s certainly something I could look at. Many people are on his side, I will say that. I don’t know him, never met him. But many people are on his side.”

In 2013, Snowden—at great personal risk—exposed to the entire world that the CIA and NSA were conducting a massive electronic spying operation on the US and world population. With extensive documentary proof, Snowden showed that these agencies were

systematically violating basic constitutional rights by sifting through data streams transmitted over telecom trunklines and secretly eavesdropping on the personal computer activity of individuals in real time, among many other criminal activities.

Within a week of the publication of his revelations, Snowden was charged with violations of the Espionage Act of 1917. After publicly identifying himself as the whistleblower who smuggled 1.7 million documents out of an NSA facility on a flash drive, Snowden fled for his safety, eventually obtaining asylum in Russia where he has been living in forced exile in Moscow ever since.

Among those denouncing the suggestion of a pardon for Edward Snowden were Congresswoman Liz Cheney (Republican, Wyoming), daughter of former Vice President Dick Cheney, who tweeted, “Edward Snowden is a traitor. He is responsible for the largest and most damaging release of classified info in US history. He handed over US secrets to Russian and Chinese intelligence putting our troops and our nation at risk. Pardoning him would be unconscionable.”

Cheney’s unsubstantiated claim that Snowden put the lives of American troops and agents at risk with his revelations—which were shared with journalists from the *Guardian* and the *Washington Post* who reviewed and published them—has been repeated by those who are closest to the US intelligence agencies. Other than undermining the illegal spying operations of US imperialism, no proof has ever been provided that anyone has lost their life from Snowden’s revelations.

Replying to Cheney’s tweet, Snowden posted on his own Twitter account, “twitter: the museum of the confidently incorrect.” Hundreds of people responded

positively to Snowden's comment, referring to him as a "hero," thanking him for his revelations and denouncing Cheney.

The top two Congressmen on the House Armed Services Committee said a pardon of Snowden would "mock our national security workforce." A statement from Chairman Adam Smith (Democrat, Washington) and Representative Mac Thornberry (Republican, Texas) said, "It would be a serious mistake to pardon anyone who is charged under the Espionage Act, who admits to leaking sensitive information, and who has spent years since then as a guest of the Putin regime."

In another bipartisan statement, former congressman Mike Rogers (Republican, Michigan) and Representative Dutch Ruppersberger (Democrat, Maryland), who served on the House Select Permanent Committee on Intelligence, wrote in a *Washington Post* Op Ed, "the only way Snowden should return to the United States is to face prosecution for his actions."

Rogers and Ruppersberger go on to make the absurd claim that Snowden should have "come to us" if he had been "truly alarmed by anything he witnessed as a CIA employee or as an NSA contractor." As everyone knows, if Snowden had brought to Congress his concerns about the massive violation of the US Constitution by the NSA, carried out with the endorsement of political figures such as Rogers and Ruppersberger, no one would ever have heard of him or the illegal spying operation.

The former House intelligence leaders also regurgitate the smears that have been leveled against Snowden's character since he first went public with his revelations, writing, "Snowden's actions were not born out of principles, morals or a commitment to civil liberties. They were illegal, opportunistic and self-serving."

Making it clear that the whistleblower could not get a fair trial if he were to return to the US to face the charges against him, they write, "Snowden is entitled, as all Americans are, to a free and fair trial. But such a trial would expose actions that profoundly betrayed his country and led to the criminal espionage case against him."

Fox News Live published an article on Monday highlighting the fact that a lawsuit filed by the US government against Snowden has revealed the whistleblower earned \$1.2 million in speaking fees

since 2015. The judge in the case—which is aimed at seizing money earned by Snowden from his memoir *Permanent Record*—made the information publicly available on Saturday. Clearly written in opposition to a pardon of Snowden, the Fox News Live article also quotes the tweet from Liz Cheney.

At the time of Snowden's revelations in 2013, the real estate swindler and TV personality Donald Trump repeatedly labelled him a "spy" and "traitor" who should be executed. According to the *New York Post*, before taking office, Trump tweeted at least 45 times that Snowden should be put to death.

In the exclusive interview with the President last Thursday from the Oval Office, the *Post* wrote, "Trump commented on Snowden for the first time as president after accusing former President Barack Obama of spying on his 2016 campaign. 'When you look at Comey and McCabe, and Brennan—and, excuse me, the man that sat at this desk, President Obama, got caught spying on my campaign with Biden. Biden and Obama, and they got caught spying on the campaign,' Trump said."

An opinion in *Bloomberg* by Eli Lake, columnist covering national security and foreign policy, argues that the President's suggestion of pardoning Snowden is "a reckless idea" that will "backfire on Trump." Lake makes the absurd claim that pardoning Snowden would undermine efforts by Attorney General William Barr to reform the FBI's use of the secret surveillance courts and correct the abuses of the intelligence community.

Lake goes on to write, "one can see why Trump and some of his advisers would be keen on rewarding Snowden seven years after his great heist of state secrets. Trump sincerely believes that the national security state that Snowden exposed unfairly spied on his campaign in 2016 and stoked a meritless investigation into his campaign's ties to Russia for the first two and a half years of his presidency. Pardoning Snowden would be a way of settling scores."



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