

EDWARD SNOWDEN - THE MAN WHO SHOOK THE WORLD

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Edward Snowden is a 36 year old US citizen, former Intelligence Community officer and whistleblower. The documents he revealed provided a vital public window into the NSA and its international intelligence partners' secret mass surveillance programs and capabilities. These revelations generated unprecedented attention around the world on privacy intrusions and digital security, leading to a global debate on the issue. During his years of IT work, Snowden had noticed the far reach of the NSA's everyday surveillance. While working for Booz Allen, Snowden began copying top-secret NSA documents, building a dossier on practices that he found invasive and disturbing. The documents contained vast information on the NSA's domestic surveillance practices.

After he had compiled a large store of documents, Snowden told his NSA supervisor that he needed a leave of absence for medical reasons, stating he had been diagnosed with epilepsy. On May 20, 2013, Snowden took a flight to Hong Kong, China, where he remained as he orchestrated a clandestine meeting with journalists from the U.K. publication The Guardian as well as filmmaker Laura Poitras. On June 5, The Guardian released secret documents obtained from Snowden. In these documents, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court implemented an order that required Verizon to release information to the NSA on an "ongoing, daily basis" culled from its American customers' phone activities. The following day, The Guardian and The Washington Post released Snowden's leaked information on PRISM, an NSA program that allows real-time information collection electronically. A flood of information followed, and both domestic and international debate ensued.

"I'm willing to sacrifice [my former life] because I can't in good conscience allow the U.S. government to destroy privacy, internet freedom and basic liberties for people around the world with this massive surveillance machine they're secretly building," Snowden said in interviews given from his Hong Kong hotel room. The fallout from his disclosures continued to unfold over the next months, including a legal battle over the collection of phone data by the NSA. President Obama sought to calm fears over government spying in January 2014, ordering U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder to review the country's surveillance programs. After travelling to Hong Kong, Snowden revealed documents to the American public on the NSA's mass surveillance programs, which were shown to be operating without any public oversight and outside the limits of the US Constitution.

The US government has charged Snowden with theft of government property, and two further charges under the 1917 Espionage Act. Each charge carries a maximum 10-year prison sentence [1].

Snowden felt that this important information should be democratized. In an interview in 2013, he said: "I'm just another guy who sits there day to day in the office, watches what's happening and goes, 'This is something that's not our place to decide, the public needs to decide whether these programs and policies are right or wrong.'" [2].

With the US pursuing his extradition, Snowden is now in Russia, where he was formally granted three years' residency from 1 August 2014, after a year of temporary asylum in Russia ended on 31st July 2014. Journalists continue to publish documents from Snowden that reveal the secret and unaccountable systems of modern global surveillance.

References

1. Edward Snowden Biography: website. URL: <https://www.biography.com/activist/edward-snowden/> (Last accessed 04.10.2019)
2. The Guardian journal article about Edward Snowden: website. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2019/sep/13/edward-snowden-interview-whistleblowing-russia-ai-permanent-record> (Last accessed 04.10.2019)

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