

No Place to Hide - Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State
Glenn Greenwald

This is a story of people who refused to be intimidated in an age of overbearing government

Glenn Greenwald was approached by Edward Snowden in December of 2012. They finally met in Hong Kong in June of 2013. Why the long delay?

Most important was the question of security. Snowden had to be sure that their communication could be secured, and he knew very well the many ways in which it could be compromised. He attempted to coach Greenwald on the intricacies of encrypted email, and was ultimately not able to do so.

In the meantime Snowden contacted another journalist whom he trusted, Laura Poitras, and she and Greenwald eventually found themselves together with Snowden in Hong Kong, where he revealed his identity.

The meeting in Hong Kong took place despite several obstacles. The administrative and legal apparatus of the Guardian newspaper, and other publications involved slowed things down, imposed administrative hurdles, and threatened the anonymity of Snowden himself. Even after it became clear what a huge story that was, the self-protective instincts of the publications involved delayed publication time after time.

It came down to fear versus greed: eventually, the Guardian's greed for a monumental scoop overcame its fear of legal consequences and they were the first to publish. The first article was on the ways in which the NSA had compromised Verizon and other telecommunications companies, forcing them to reveal metadata collected on not only foreigners but US citizens. The second article, the following day, was on the PRISM program, which compromised virtually all of the major Internet providers in the United States, forcing them to give the NSA backdoor access to Internet traffic.

The book is very much about the media itself. The message is that government intimidation has been effective in restricting what the media will report. This is an era in which media holdings have become increasingly consolidated. They have much more the character of business, and less interest in investigative reporting, especially stories that are adverse to government. Greenwald is especially hard on the two publications that hold themselves out to be at the vanguard of investigative journalism, the New York Times and the Washington Post. To a large extent they are captive of the government they are supposed to keep honest.

Snowden was unusual as a source in that he was a patently intelligent, rational, balanced human being. It would be hard to tar him with the same brush as Julian Assange and Bradley Manning. He had had extraordinarily wide access, and in fact had come to the conclusion that the NSA's activity had to be exposed a couple of years prior to actually revealing it. This gave him time to change jobs, taking a pay

cut to join Booz Allen in a position which would give him access to more complete data on the story that he wanted to tell.

Once the Guardian newspaper appreciated what they had, they at least offered him protection and they released the story in the sequence and the style that Snowden had requested. It was calculated to have a maximum of impact, the maximum leverage to awaken the world public to the dangers being posed to their privacy. Snowden intended the story to minimize his own personality. He knew from observation that there would be vituperative attacks against his person, and he wanted to make the data itself the story. That is why he chose Greenwald and Portias to tell it.

Part of the plan was to reveal Snowden as the source after the first few stories were published. Once this was done, the rest of the media quickly figured out he was in Hong Kong and descended on his hotel. It was a scene of chaos, and Snowden escaped with a disguise, going to safe houses in Hong Kong and rather shortly thereafter attempting to escape to Latin America via Russia. That plan being foiled, he remained in Russia. The book does not concern itself at all with his exile there.

Chapter 4 delves into the breadth of NSA surveillance and the need for it. The NSA's stated objective, per the book, is to read absolutely every communication throughout the world, giving themselves the power to sift through them. This is done in the name of thwarting terrorism, although there is little evidence given anywhere that the NSA has been effective in satisfying this mission. What they have managed to do, quite successfully, is to dampen criticism of governments. They make citizens reluctant to join movements such as Occupy Wall Street or the Tea Party which threatened the powers that be.

Chapter 5 documents Greenwald's own treatment in the year since the story came out, and especially the way that members of the media, David Gregory by name, attacked his standing as a journalist and his right to protect his sources and publish the documents he received. Both the United States government and the British government have been quite severe in their treatment of him, and abusive in their treatment of the Guardian newspaper which published him.

Snowden has taken refuge in Russia. He cannot be at ease with what the Russian government has done in Ukraine, but on the other hand, this book documents the growth of a totalitarian mentality within the supposed democracies of the West. It begs the question of how different Putin really is. We would like to think that the West is a citadel of democratic values and protections. This book tells quite a different story

No place to hide

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Chapter 1, contact

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Somewhat troubling was Snowden's manifesto when he why he was doing this. It smacked to the Guardian editors of the unit bomber, Ted Kaczynski. Nonetheless, the alternative the documents swayed them. Even if they were dealing with a nutcase, it was a nutcase who had some extremely valuable material.

More complications – the Guardian decided to add a senior editor, somebody unknown to the reporters, Greenwald and Lauren Porteous, and also on known to Edward Snowden. It would most likely queer the deal. They were furious.

On the airplane on the way over they read documents about the way in which the patriot act has been interpreted by the oversight agency, and the fact that the foreign intelligence oversight Board (Correct this) was allowing across-the-board intercepts of all telephone communications by Americans, both domestically and overseas. The Obama administration had exceeded what had been feared that the Bush White House might do.

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Arrive in Hong Kong at June second, 2013. Note that this is six months after the initial contact.

After a day of cloak-and-dagger exercises to shake any tails and avoid surveillance, they get down to business. Greenwald is shocked at how young Snowden looks, and is.

He gets the whole story, how a high school dropout with a bent for technology rose quickly within the CIA and NSA ranks. He was an outstanding cryptographic problem-solver. Overseas work in Switzerland and Japan convinced him that the government's actions were morally wrong. His reading of Greek mythology and history gave him a good moral foundation. Also, Ironically, video games.

A true representative of his generation, he had a reverence for the Internet and a conviction that it must remain free.

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Why the Guardian? The Washington Post and New York Times are in many ways captive of the government. They sit on stories, and vet them with the government agencies being reported, rather than simply report the truth. They sat on stories of secret CIA prisons during Bush's reelection.

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The Guardian got cold feet. The Obama administration's increasingly vicious attacks on the media had its effect. Media were scared, as the government called journalists co-conspirators who abetted crimes and terrorism.

Next day, Ewen MacAskill, the Guardian "minder" sent to Hong Kong, is introduced. He will be essential to getting the Guardian to take the risk of publishing. Ewen proved himself a dedicated member of the team – essential to get published.

They wanted not only to reveal the NSA documents, and alert the public to the sinister operations of their government, but to reveal the corrupt and compromised nature of journalism.

Greenwald issues an ultimatum, forcing the Guardian to decide to print – which they do. The response is immediate and immense. The New York Times supports them in an editorial.

Next day is the PRISM article – about the Internet companies being compromised. The Post also publishes, tipped off by the NSA itself, in an attempt to get a more favorable slant. Laura Poitras' byline appears.

It is the number one story, and they keep coming. Snowden is full of gallows humor, not revealing any plan for where to go when Hong Kong gets too hot. His major concern is for his girlfriend and family.

Snowden's fearlessness was a major story unto itself. The government made a concerted effort to intimidate people, but Snowden pointedly refused to be cowed.

There are morning TV talk shows arranged. The videos of Snowden are released, so his identity is known. The media discover the hotel in Hong Kong, and it is chaos. He is spirited out of the hotel into a safe house by Guardian lawyers. But how safe? The US government has asked Hong Kong to apprehend and turn him over.

Greenwald left Hong Kong at this point. The job was done, and it was not clear he would ever see Snowden again. He returned to Rio, on the advice of the Guardian, who feared what the US government might do.

The next step was for the Guardian to organize to analyze the huge trove of documents Snowden had provided. Although he provided acronym dictionaries, and had organized them, they were still written in internal jargon and difficult to decipher.

Taken in its entirety, the Snowden archive led to an ultimately simple conclusion: the US government had built a system that has as its goal the complete elimination of electronic privacy worldwide.

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A discourse as to what the NSA is. It is a branch of the Pentagon, the largest Intelligence agency in the world.

Four-star General Keith Alexander had been in the United States chief of intelligence in Iraq. He was frustrated that the intercepts their lie called suspected terrorists. He wanted it all. When he took over the NSA, that philosophy but it brought. Collected all. He alarmed even the hawks around him, such as his predecessor Michael Hayden.

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30,000 employees plus 60,000 contractors.

The United States government has compelled the United States based organizations, technology companies, to install backdoors giving the NSA access to traffic passes through their technology. This includes Cisco, Oracle, and many others. This is ultimately damaging to the business interests of these American companies, as foreign partners will no longer trust them.

Microsoft's Skydrive "cloud" touts privacy, but the company spent many months ensuring the government backdoor access.

The NSA cooperated shared data with other intelligence agencies, especially the CIA. There is no meaningful barrier between domestic and foreign intelligence in the realm of signal intelligence. The NSA is the lead on everything.

The Five Eyes group – English speaking democracies – cooperate. The NSA rarely spies on them. Closest is Britain.

The relationship with Israel is rather peculiar. The United States provides Israel with filtered intelligence data, vast amounts of it. Yet, in return, the Israelis care to give to provide only a limited amount of intelligence, and it mostly intelligence that is self-serving; advancing Israeli interests.

The FISA was set up as a cosmetic device. From 1978 to 2002 it rejected no requests for surveillance. Since then it has rejected only 11, and approved 20,000. It is a rubber stamp.

The intelligence oversight committees in both houses of Congress are captive of the intelligence community itself. They actively frustrate other members requests for even the most basic information on the intelligence community. The cloak of secrecy is thrown over the entire operation, so it is difficult to determine whether or not their activities are legal or warranted.

There have been several rounds of fake reform, inspired by Frank Church and others, legislation designed to give the appearance of oversight, without doing anything meaningful in the way of actual

oversight. Diane Feinstein, whose husband has significant financial interests in the intelligence business, has headed the intelligence oversight committee.

Greenwald concludes that the NSA is a rogue agency, spying on domestic and foreign citizens alike, with no meaningful oversight. It conducts two types of collection: content and metadata. The argument that metadata is not important is disingenuous. When the government knows everybody with whom you are in email contact, and everybody that you telephone, and the length of those conversations and emails, they have a quite detailed picture of your life. It is a substantial invasion of a person's privacy.

In SA communications intercepts support the economic interests of United States companies. Some of the documents revealed by Snowden show spying on Brazilian president Delma Russell off and the Mexican government. It was passed along to United States trade representative's and presumably to the heads of American corporations to tip them off with regard to sensitive discussions especially about oil.

The United States is also interested in the conversations of heads of state. It was revealed that they had routinely tapped the cell phone of Angela Merkel of Germany, over the course of many years. Ambassador Susan Rice requested signal intelligence to learn the negotiating position of opposite numbers in international negotiations.

The United States has engaged in extensive and long-standing propaganda against four and telecommunications companies, notably Hugh White of China. They accused the Chinese of embedding backdoors in their equipment. This is, ironically, precisely what US manufacturers were doing at the direction of the US government.

That ends the discussion of what the NSA is capable of doing. In a word, practically everything.

Chapter 4 is entitled "the harm of surveillance". The question one might ask is, if you have done nothing wrong, you have nothing to fear. Here is why that is wrong.

We all behave differently in private than in public. We do not want to behave as if we are under constant observation.

In the political sphere, there is growing discontent with the government's. This is manifested by the tea party, the occupy movement, and other political movements within the United States. There are similar movements throughout the world. If the governments are able to identify the leaders, and discourage people from participating, they are essentially squelching free speech. This is something that they want to do. Governments do not want challenges to their monopoly on power.

There is evidence that the NSA surveillance has driven marketing writers to self censor. They are careful what they put in emails. There are some topics that they avoid.

Bart Gellman made the point this way: Privacy is relational. It depends on your audience. You don't want your employer to know you're job hunting. You don't spill all about your love life to your mom, or your kids. You don't tell trade secrets to your rivals. We don't expose ourselves indiscriminately and we care enough about exposure to lie as a matter of course. Among upstanding citizens, researchers have consistently found that lying is "an everyday social interaction" (twice a day among college students, once a day in the Real World).... Comprehensive transparency is a nightmare.... Everyone has something to hide.

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The government has long placed political enemies under surveillance. J Edgar Hoover did it, Nixon did it, it was done during the McCarthy era, and Obama does it. It is always done with the intention of stifling dissent. It was widely used during the Vietnam war, as program COINTELPRO.

IRS targeting of dissidents is also a longstanding practice.

Indeed, after British authorities detained my partner, David Miranda, at Heathrow airport under an antiterrorism statute, the UK government expressly equated my surveillance reporting with terrorism on the ground that the release of the Snowden documents "is designed to influence a government and is made for the purposes of promoting a political or ideological cause. This therefore falls within the definition of terrorism." This is the clearest possible statement of linking a threat to the interests of power to terrorism.

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Surveillance cheerleaders essentially offer only one argument: is necessary to stop terrorism and keep people safe.

However, most of the data collected have nothing to do with terrorism – security. This is patently obvious in the communications of Brazilian oil executives or the German head of state. Moreover, there is no evidence that the massive efforts have prevented terror, despite Obama's claims to the contrary. Democratic Senators on the intelligence committee say that the mass collection of telephone records is not in any way enhanced marked action is terrorism.

Collecting too much data makes it difficult to focus on the important data. The evidence has been there for lots such as 9/11, but it has been impossible to sift out and act on it in a timely fashion.

The problem, though, is that there are far too many power factions with a vested interest in the fear of terrorism: the government, seeking justification for its actions; the surveillance and weapons industries, drowning in public funding; and the permanent power factions in Washington, committed to setting their priorities without real challenge.

Chapter 5 – the fourth estate.

This chapter documents the abuse that when Greenwald has received since the publication of the papers. They dismiss him as a blogger, not a serious journalist. They dug up every bit of sleeves that they could on him, down to the fact that he had had a dispute 10 years earlier with regard to the fact that his dog was over the weight limit established by the condominium association.

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