

Dilemma for the Warfare- Surveillance State: NSA and CIA Cannot be Sure that its Personnel “Will Obey the Rules”

David Brooks, Tom Friedman, Bill Keller Wish Snowden Had Just Followed Orders

By [Norman Solomon](#)

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Edward Snowden’s disclosures, the New York Times reported on Sunday, “have renewed a longstanding concern: that young Internet aficionados whose skills the agencies need for counterterrorism and cyberdefense sometimes bring an anti-authority spirit that does not fit the security bureaucracy.”

Agencies like the NSA and CIA — and private contractors like Booz Allen — can’t be sure that all employees will obey the rules without interference from their own idealism. This is a basic dilemma for the warfare/surveillance state, which must hire and retain a huge pool of young talent to service the digital innards of a growing Big Brother.

With private firms scrambling to recruit workers for top-secret government contracts, the current situation was foreshadowed by novelist John Hersey in his 1960 book *The Child Buyer*. When the vice president of a contractor named United Lymphomilloid, “in charge of materials procurement,” goes shopping for a very bright ten-year-old, he explains that “my duties have an extremely high national-defense rating.” And he adds: “When a commodity that you need falls in short supply, you have to get out and hustle. I buy brains.”

That’s what Booz Allen and similar outfits do. They buy brains. And obedience.

But despite the best efforts of those contractors and government agencies, the brains still belong to people. And, as the Times put it, an “anti-authority spirit” might not fit “the security bureaucracy.”

In the long run, Edward Snowden didn’t fit. Neither did Bradley Manning. They both had brains that seemed useful to authority. But they also had principles and decided to act on them.

Like the NSA and its contractors, the U.S. military is in constant need of personnel. “According to his superiors . . . Manning was not working out as a soldier, and they discussed keeping him back when his unit was deployed to Iraq,” biographer Chase Madar writes in *The Passion of Bradley Manning*. “However, in the fall of 2009, the occupation was desperate for intelligence analysts with computer skills, and Private Bradley Manning, his superiors hurriedly concluded, showed signs of improvement as a workable soldier. This is how, on October 10, 2009, Private First Class Bradley Manning was deployed . . . to Iraq as

an intelligence analyst.”

In their own ways, with very different backgrounds and circumstances, Bradley Manning and Edward Snowden have confounded the best-laid plans of the warfare/surveillance state. They worked for “the security bureaucracy,” but as time went on they found a higher calling than just following orders. They leaked information that we all have a right to know.

This month, not only with words but also with actions, Edward Snowden is transcending the moral limits of authority and insisting that we can fully defend the Bill of Rights, emphatically including the Fourth Amendment.

What a contrast with New York Times columnists David Brooks, Thomas Friedman and Bill Keller, who have responded to Snowden’s revelations by siding with the violators of civil liberties at the top of the U.S. government.

Brooks denounced Snowden as “a traitor” during a June 14 appearance on the PBS NewsHour, saying indignantly: “He betrayed his oath, which was given to him and which he took implicitly and explicitly. He betrayed his company, the people who gave him a job, the people who trusted him. . . . He betrayed the democratic process. It’s not up to a lone 29-year-old to decide what’s private and public. We have — actually have procedures for that set down in the Constitution and established by tradition.”

Enthralled with lockstep compliance, Brooks preached the conformist gospel: “When you work for an institution, any institution, a company, a faculty, you don’t get to violate the rules of that institution and decide for your own self what you’re going to do in a unilateral way that no one else can reverse. And that’s exactly what he did. So he betrayed the trust of the institution. He betrayed what creates a government, which is being a civil servant, being a servant to a larger cause, and not going off on some unilateral thing because it makes you feel grandiose.”

In sync with such bombast, Tom Friedman and former Times executive editor Bill Keller have promoted a notably gutless argument for embracing the NSA’s newly revealed surveillance programs. Friedman [wrote](#) (on June 12) and Keller [agreed](#) (June 17) that our government is correct to curtail privacy rights against surveillance — because if we fully retained those rights and then a big terrorist attack happened, the damage to civil liberties would be worse.

What a contrast between big-name journalists craven enough to toss the Fourth Amendment overboard and whistleblowers courageous enough to risk their lives for civil liberties.

Norman Solomon is co-founder of RootsAction.org and founding director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. His books include “War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death.”

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