

The Pursuit of Edward Snowden: Washington in a Rage, Striving to Run the World

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Rarely has any American provoked such fury in Washington's high places. So far, Edward Snowden has outsmarted the smartest guys in the echo chamber — and he has proceeded with the kind of moral clarity that U.S. officials seem to find unfathomable.

Bipartisan condemnations of Snowden are escalating from Capitol Hill and the Obama administration. More of the NSA's massive surveillance program is now visible in the light of day — which is exactly what it can't stand.

The central issue is our dire shortage of democracy. How can we have real consent of the governed when the government is entrenched with extreme secrecy, surveillance and contempt for privacy?

The same government that continues to expand its invasive dragnet of surveillance, all over the United States and the rest of the world, is now asserting its prerogative to drag Snowden back to the USA from anywhere on the planet. It's not only about punishing him and discouraging other potential whistleblowers. Top U.S. officials are also determined to — quite literally — silence Snowden's voice, as Bradley Manning's voice has been nearly silenced behind prison walls.

The sunshine of information, the beacon of principled risk-takers, the illumination of government actions that can't stand the light of day — these correctives are anathema to U.S. authorities who insist that really informative whistleblowers belong in solitary confinement. A big problem for those authorities is that so many people crave the sunny beacons of illumination.

On Sunday night, more than 15,000 Americans took action to [send a clear message to the White House](#). The subject line said "Mr. President, hands off Edward Snowden," and the email message read: "I urge you in the strongest terms to do nothing to interfere with the travels or political asylum process of Edward Snowden. The U.S. government must not engage in abduction or any other form of foul play against Mr. Snowden."

As the Obama White House weighs its options, the limits are practical and political. Surveillance and military capacities are inseparable, and they're certainly huge, but constraints may cause major frustration. Sunday on CNN, anchor Don Lemon cited the fabled Navy Seals and said such commandos ought to be able to capture Snowden, pronto.

The state of surveillance and perpetual war are one and the same. The U.S. government's rationale for pervasive snooping is the "war on terror," the warfare state under whatever name.

Too rarely mentioned is the combination of nonviolence and idealism that has been integral to the courageous whistleblowing by Edward Snowden and Bradley Manning. Right now, one is on a perilous journey across the globe in search of political asylum, while the other is locked up in a prison and confined to a military trial excluding the human dimensions of the case. At a time of Big Brother and endless war, Snowden and Manning have bravely insisted that a truly better world is possible.

Meanwhile, top policymakers in Washington seem bent on running as much of the world as possible. Their pursuit of Edward Snowden has evolved into a frenzied rage.

Those at the top of the U.S. government insist that Edward Snowden and Bradley Manning have betrayed it. But that's backward. Putting its money on vast secrecy and military violence instead of democracy, the government has betrayed Snowden and Manning and the rest of us.

Trying to put a stop to all that secrecy and violence, we have no assurance of success. But continuing to try is a prerequisite for realistic hope.

A few months before the invasion of Iraq, looking out at Baghdad from an upper story of a hotel, I thought of something Albert Camus once wrote.

“And henceforth, the only honorable course will be to stake everything on a formidable gamble: that words are more powerful than munitions.”

Edward Snowden's honorable course has led him to this historic moment. The U.S. government is eager to pay him back with retribution and solitary. But many people in the United States and around the world are responding with love and solidarity.

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