

# NSA Whistleblower Edward Snowden Reveals Himself

By [Zero Hedge](#)

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*"I realised that I was part of something that was doing far more harm than good... The NSA routinely lies in response to Congressional inquiries about scope of surveillance in America. The NSA is intent on making every conversation and every form of behaviour in the world known to them.... What they're doing poses an existential threat to democracy." - Edward Snowden, 29, PRISM Whistleblower*

The US government will be happy to learn it will save several million dollars on the criminal inquiry into the identity of the NSA's PRISM whistleblower because moments ago in a [lengthy profile by the Guardian's Glenn Greenwald](#), said whistleblower has decided to reveal himself to the world: he is Edward Snowden, 29 years old. Originally from Elizabeth City, NC, a Maryland community college dropout and former Special Forces trainee, the 10 year "veteran" with the NSA, most recently in its Hawaii office under the employ of defense contractor Booz Allen Hamilton, has just made history and joined the pantheon of such legendary whistleblowers of the US government's secret activities as the Pentagon Papers' Daniel Ellsberg and Wikileaks' Bradley Manning. Last but not least, *Edward is currently residing in Hong Kong, out of harm's (read America's) way.*



Who is Edward and how did he end up at the NSA? [The Guardian has the full story.](#)

By his own admission, he was not a stellar student. In order to get the credits necessary to obtain a high school diploma, he attended a community college in Maryland, studying computing, but never completed the coursework.

In 2003, he enlisted in the US army and began a training program to join the Special Forces. Invoking the same principles that he now cites to justify his leaks, he said: "I wanted to fight in the Iraq war because I felt like I had an obligation as a human being to help free people from oppression".

He recounted how his beliefs about the war's purpose were quickly dispelled. "Most of the people training us seemed pumped up about killing Arabs, not helping anyone," he said. After he broke both his legs in a training accident, he was discharged.

After that, he got his first job in an NSA facility, working as a security guard for one of the agency's covert facilities at the University of Maryland. From there, he went to the CIA, where he worked on IT security. His understanding of the internet and his talent for computer programming enabled him to rise fairly quickly for someone who lacked even a high school diploma.

By 2007, the CIA stationed him with diplomatic cover in Geneva, Switzerland. His responsibility for maintaining computer network security meant he had clearance to access a wide array of classified documents.

That access, along with the almost three years he spent around CIA officers, led him to begin seriously questioning the rightness of what he saw.

He described as formative an incident in which he claimed CIA operatives were attempting to recruit a Swiss banker to obtain secret banking information. Snowden said they achieved this by purposely getting the banker drunk and encouraging him to drive home in his car. When the banker was arrested for drunk driving, the undercover agent seeking to befriend him offered to help, and a bond was formed that led to successful recruitment.

“Much of what I saw in Geneva really disillusioned me about how my government functions and what its impact is in the world,” he says. “I realised that I was part of something that was doing far more harm than good.”

He left the CIA in 2009 in order to take his first job working for a private contractor that assigned him to a functioning NSA facility, stationed on a military base in Japan. It was then, he said, that he “watched as Obama advanced the very policies that I thought would be reined in”, and as a result, “I got hardened.”

Why did he wait so long?

He said it was during his CIA stint in Geneva that he thought for the first time about exposing government secrets. But, at the time, he chose not to for two reasons.

First, he said: “Most of the secrets the CIA has are about people, not machines and systems, so I didn’t feel comfortable with disclosures that I thought could endanger anyone”. Secondly, the election of Barack Obama in 2008 gave him hope that there would be real reforms, rendering disclosures unnecessary.

That did not happen. So he proceeded to reveal what he knows about the NSA to a newspaper which the NYT pejoratively referred to as a “British News Site.” Well, he certainly did not go with any of the news sites on favorable terms with the current administration. Instead, “He purposely chose, he said, to give the documents to journalists whose judgment he trusted about what should be public and what should remain concealed.”

Which of course brings up the question: now what, and why risk what was otherwise a “comfortable life” in a Hawaiian paradise?

In a note accompanying the first set of documents he provided, he wrote: “I understand that I will be made to suffer for my actions,” but “I will be satisfied if the federation of secret law, unequal pardon and irresistible executive powers that rule the world that I love are revealed even for an instant.”

Despite his determination to be publicly unveiled, he repeatedly insisted that he wants to avoid the media spotlight. “I don’t want public attention because I don’t want the story to be about me. I want it to be about what the US government is doing.”

He does not fear the consequences of going public, he said, only that doing so will distract attention from the issues raised by his disclosures. "I know the media likes to personalise political debates, and I know the government will demonise me."

Despite these fears, he remained hopeful his outing will not divert attention from the substance of his disclosures. "I really want the focus to be on these documents and the debate which I hope this will trigger among citizens around the globe about what kind of world we want to live in." He added: "My sole motive is to inform the public as to that which is done in their name and that which is done against them."

He has had "a very comfortable life" that included a salary of roughly \$200,000, a girlfriend with whom he shared a home in Hawaii, a stable career, and a family he loves. "I'm willing to sacrifice all of that because I can't in good conscience allow the US government to destroy privacy, internet freedom and basic liberties for people around the world with this massive surveillance machine they're secretly building."

That said, he has left the US and is now in Hong Kong, which in the New Normal is a safer venue for those exposing what until recently was considered a massive conspiracy theory.

Three weeks ago, Snowden made final preparations that resulted in last week's series of blockbuster news stories. At the NSA office in Hawaii where he was working, he copied the last set of documents he intended to disclose.

He then advised his NSA supervisor that he needed to be away from work for "a couple of weeks" in order to receive treatment for epilepsy, a condition he learned he suffers from after a series of seizures last year.

As he packed his bags, he told his girlfriend that he had to be away for a few weeks, though he said he was vague about the reason. "That is not an uncommon occurrence for someone who has spent the last decade working in the intelligence world."

On May 20, he boarded a flight to Hong Kong, where he has remained ever since. He chose the city because "they have a spirited commitment to free speech and the right of political dissent", and because he believed that it was one of the few places in the world that both could and would resist the dictates of the US government.

Snowden's future is bleak to say the least, and if Bradley Manning's recent travails are any indication, a life in prison may be an upside option:

"All my options are bad," he said. The US could begin extradition proceedings against him, a potentially problematic, lengthy and unpredictable course for Washington. Or the Chinese government might whisk him away for questioning, viewing him as a useful source of information. Or he might end up being grabbed and bundled into a plane bound for US territory.

"Yes, I could be rendered by the CIA. I could have people come after me. Or any of the third-party partners. They work closely with a number of other nations. Or they could pay off the Triads. Any of their agents or assets," he said.

"We have got a CIA station just up the road - the consulate here in Hong Kong

- and I am sure they are going to be busy for the next week. And that is a concern I will live with for the rest of my life, however long that happens to be.”

Having watched the Obama administration prosecute whistleblowers at a historically unprecedented rate, he fully expects the US government to attempt to use all its weight to punish him. “I am not afraid,” he said calmly, “because this is the choice I’ve made.”

He predicts the government will launch an investigation and “say I have broken the Espionage Act and helped our enemies, but that can be used against anyone who points out how massive and invasive the system has become”.

The only time he became emotional during the many hours of interviews was when he pondered the impact his choices would have on his family, many of whom work for the US government. “The only thing I fear is the harmful effects on my family, who I won’t be able to help any more. That’s what keeps me up at night,” he said, his eyes welling up with tears.

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As for his future, he is vague. He hoped the publicity the leaks have generated will offer him some protection, making it “harder for them to get dirty”.

He views his best hope as the possibility of asylum, with Iceland - with its reputation of a champion of internet freedom - at the top of his list. He knows that may prove a wish unfulfilled.

But after the intense political controversy he has already created with just the first week’s haul of stories, “I feel satisfied that this was all worth it. I have no regrets.”

Now the great debate begins: is sacrificing it all in the name of ethical principles under a totalitarian regime now fully set on destroying you, worth it? And since we are dealing with one grand revealed conspiracy, another one will naturally emerge: is Snowden’s explanation of his motives honest and accurate? Why now and why him? Surely *at least one* other person has worked at the NSA in the past decade whose thought process has been identical and who put the value of democracy over and above that of one’s personal career development and safety.

Most importantly, the ball is now in Obama’s court, and the constitutional scholar’s every action will be studied under a microscope by civil liberty defenders (both real and paid for) everywhere while one Jon Corzine withdraws millions of dollars from East Hampton ATM machines unhindered, and without any scruples.

Finally, we would like to thank Snowden for putting a nail into the coffin of all those who use the term “conspiracy theorist” pejoratively. Because whatever his motives, whatever the outcome of this dramatic escalation between the people’s right to know and a government intent on hijacking all civil liberties one by one, Snowden has showed that the distance from *Conspiracy Theory* to *Conspiracy Fact* is just one ethical judgment away.

For those curious, [here is the full text](#) of the US-Hong Kong Extradition treaty.

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*Snowden's interview with the Guardian's Glenn Greenwald (produced by WaPo's Laura Poitras) can be seen after the jump.*



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