

“Secrets for Sale” and The Snowden Affair: The Greenwald-Omidyar-NSA Connection

By [James Corbett](#)

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Despite what Time Magazine would [have us believe](#), there is no doubt that the most influential newsmaker of the year has been Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee and NSA subcontractor who at the age of 29 became the unlikely center of global attention with his release of documents allegedly detailing the inner workings of various NSA spying programs.

Of the many intriguing aspects of this story, by far one of the most frustrating is that, other than a few interviews and press conferences, almost everything we know about Snowden, his motivations, and the documents themselves come from intermediaries who have found themselves in the position of spokespeople on the case.

Even such basic questions as how many documents Snowden leaked is still unclear, with various sources listing anything from [10,000](#) to [1.7 million documents](#). If details as basic as these vary so widely between sources, how much more opaque are the more difficult questions of Snowden’s motivations and intentions, let alone the specifics of any deals he may have made with journalists about how this data was to be disseminated?

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Questions about the practices of the journalists that Snowden has partnered with arose from the moment the story broke. According to Washington Post reporter Barton Gelman’s [own account](#), he was the first to be contacted with Snowden’s information. One of Snowden’s conditions for working with Gelman was that the Post agree to publish the full text of the PRISM program presentation—a total of 42 slides—within 72 hours, along with a cryptographic key that Snowden could use to prove to foreign embassies that he was the source of the information. According to Gelman, when he could not promise to meet that demand, Snowden turned to Greenwald and the Guardian.

Although several conflicting accounts of Snowden’s early efforts to reach out to reporters have since been forwarded, it is interesting to note that the Guardian did not meet these demands either, publishing [only four](#) of the 41 PRISM slides. It wasn’t until October of this year that Le Monde published [several more slides](#) from the presentation but to this day the full presentation has still not been released to the public, apparently in contradiction to Gelman’s account of Snowden’s intentions.

In fact, similar questions surround the ongoing release of Snowden’s documents. Who is deciding what documents to release and what documents to redact? Is there a timeframe for the release of specific pieces of information, and if so is this schedule being kept? Did

Snowden himself have demands in regards to the release of these documents, or, after demanding a certain timeframe and method for release of the PRISM documents and finding that none of his journalist contacts would fulfill that agreement, did he merely hand over his entire document cache to them to release as they see fit?

Again, we only have the word of the journalists themselves to answer these questions, meaning that we have no definitive answer at all. However, revelations continue to emerge about what is and what is not being published by the media partners who have acquired possession of these documents.

After six months of reporting on the story, the Guardian has so far only published [1% of the files](#) in its possession. According to a rough estimate [published on Cryptome.org](#) in November of this year, “Out of [a] reported 50,000 pages (or files, not clear which), about 514 pages (1%) have been released over 5 months beginning June 5, 2013. At this rate, 100 pages per month, it will take 42 years for full release. Snowden will be 72 years old, his reporters hoarding secrets all dead.” Is this really what Snowden or even the journalists themselves intended to happen with this treasure trove of information? Can the glacial pace at which the documents are being released be justified by the state of disorganization or confusion that the massive data dump has caused for the stories’ reporters?

Not according to Glenn Greenwald. Back in June, shortly after the initial reporting on the Snowden story and the PRISM program, Greenwald [told BuzzFeed](#) that the documents had been beautifully organized, “almost to a scary degree.” He then went on to imply that his reporting on the story would be over in a matter of months, telling journalist Jessica Testa: “If I’m still working on these stories a year from now, I’ll probably be in an asylum somewhere.”

So what changed? Why are we now six months into the Snowden story and the public has still only seen 1% of the documents in question (or less, depending on how many documents there actually are)? Has something come along in the meantime to persuade the crusading journalists who are so fearlessly reporting on this story to slow down and draw out their reporting?

In mid-July of this year, just weeks after telling BuzzFeed that he was planning to finish his reporting on Snowden within the year, it was [announced](#) that he had signed a book deal with Metropolitan Books, a subsidiary of Henry Holt and Co., for an undisclosed sum. Although Greenwald’s defenders bristle at the suggestion that the journalist is holding back documents from the public so he can sell them to the publisher, this aspect of the book deal is not even controversial. At the time of the announcement, Metropolitan Books promised that it would contain “new revelations exposing the extraordinary cooperation of private industry” with the US intelligence community. In a recent [Reuters interview](#), Greenwald was even more specific:

The book is “about my time with Snowden in Hong Kong and reporting the story, but mostly about the surveillance state based on the documents I have (that The Guardian doesn’t) and my reasons why the surveillance state is menacing,” he said in the Reuters piece.

A bidding war is now taking place for the movie rights to the book, with the New York Times reporting that 20th Century Fox, Sony Pictures Entertainment and HBO are all bidding on the project, although Greenwald assures Reuters that no deal has been struck yet.

But for those who are concerned about the fact that Greenwald is hoarding documents in order to entice publishers and movie producers to bid up his projects, more concerning still are details of the [new journalism venture](#) that he is entering into with billionaire eBay magnate Pierre Omidyar.

But the question is again raised: if Greenwald has continued to hold back documents from The Guardian and other outlets for his own personal use, did he use the allure of those documents as bait to attract Omidyar's investment? Is he, in fact, selling Snowden's leaked documents to a billionaire?

At this point, we have only speculation to go on. Very [few details](#) of Greenwald's agreement with Omidyar have been so far presented to the public, and unless some insider is to come forward with a leak speculation of the specifics of their business partnership remain in the realm of speculation. But we do know that at the end of September, Greenwald and Scahill [revealed](#) that they were working on a ground-breaking story containing new details on the NSA's role in the US assassination program gleaned from Greenwald's private stash of Snowden documents.

Two weeks later the \$250 million deal with Omidyar was announced and talk of the assassination program expose stopped. Three months later, no further details have been released about the story, and whether or not it will appear as one of the first big ventures on Omidyar's new news venture.

More worrying still are Pierre Omidyar's role in this saga. That this billionaire co-founder of eBay is suddenly so concerned with the state of journalism that he is willing to drop a quarter of a billion dollars purchasing the services of the very man who is sitting on a trove of tens of thousands (or more) NSA documents is odd, especially considering that Omidyar's record on civil liberties and his network's connections to the NSA and Booz Allen Hamilton are enough to raise serious red flags about his new venture.

As principal shareholder and chairman of eBay, Omidyar controls eBay's child company, PayPal. PayPal has recently made headlines for prosecuting the so-called "[PayPal 14](#)," the hacktivists who staged a virtual 'sit in' in protest of PayPal's decision to cut off Wikileaks' funding by organizing a Denial of Service attack on PayPal's website. PayPal was co-founded by Max Levchin, a [dedicated NSA supporter](#).

More worrying still, Sal Gambiano, one of the principal investment partners with the Omidyar Network, actually sits on the [board of advisors](#) of Globant, a software company in which both the Omidyar Network and Booz Allen Hamilton, Snowden's former employer, are [major shareholders](#). [Philip Odeen](#), one of the Booz Allen Hamilton board members, also sits on the Board of Directors of Globant. The [Omidyar Network](#) and [Booz Allen Hamilton](#) are also both major investors in Innocentive.

Yet somehow none of these concerns are enough for Greenwald's most ardent supporters to even raise the question of how he is using his personal collection of leaked NSA files and who he is getting into bed with financially to do so.

One truly independent media figure who has raised this question publicly in recent days is Sibel Edmonds of Boiling Frogs Post. In a recent series of articles she has been reporting on the [Greenwald-Omidyar-PayPal-NSA connection](#), and has exclusively reported that a retired NSA source is claiming that PayPal involvement in the NSA is explicitly mentioned in some of

the documents that Greenwald has yet to share with the public. Greenwald has issued denials to the effect that he has not encountered any such information in the leaks, but [has stated](#) that he has no doubt that PayPal has a relationship with the NSA. However, to those presuming to ask questions about the possible conflict of interest of the lead NSA leak reporter teaming up with a man whose personal financial empire rests on a company that ‘undoubtedly’ has a relationship with the NSA, Greenwald is surprisingly quick to issue [ad hominem attacks](#) and surprisingly slow to issue a substantive refutation of this concern.

Now, a number of [whistleblowers](#) and [journalists](#) are lining up to [voice their own concerns](#) about the fact that the only two people in the world with the access to the full treasure trove of Snowden documents, Glenn Greenwald and Laura Poitras, are joining forces with billionaire Pierre Omidyar.

Glenn Greenwald has repeatedly ignored request for comment for this video report, but has posted a lengthy response to such charges on his website in a post entitled “<http://utdocuments.blogspot.com.br/2014/01/email-exchange-with-reader-over-first.html>” target=”_blank”>Email exchange with reader over First Look and NSA reporting.” In the post, Greenwald bizarrely claims that his critics are forgetting that Laura Poitras also has access to the full set of Snowden documents without noting that she is also joining Omidyar’s \$250 million operation. When he does address the issue of the blatant conflicts of interest in the situation, he writes:

“Ultimately, in terms of ‘conflicts of interest’, how is this different from working with any other media outlet? Salon has very rich funders: do you think I suppressed stories that conflicted with their business interests? Democracy Now is funded by lots of rich people: do you think Amy Goodman conceals big stories that would undermine the business interests of her funders?”

Although clearly intended as a rhetorical question meant to make the foundation funding of sources like Democracy Now seem to be unproblematic, this is in fact an issue that has been addressed many times by outlets like BoilingFrogsPost.com and other commentators who are unhappy with the reporting of the likes of Amy Goodman.

In the end, of course, only time will tell if Greenwald courageously works to expose the NSA/PayPal linkages via his new Omidyar-sponsored position. Unfortunately for us, if that reporting proceeds at the current pace, most of the people watching this video will be dead before such a day ever comes.

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Articles by: [James Corbett](#)

About the author:

James Corbett is a Film Director and Producer based in Okayama, Japan. He started The Corbett Report (www.corbettreport.com) website in 2007 as an outlet for independent critical analysis of politics, society, history, and economics. It operates on the principle of open source intelligence and provides podcasts, interviews, articles and videos about breaking news and important issues from 9/11 Truth and false flag terror to the Big Brother police state, eugenics, geopolitics, the central banking fraud and more.

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