

SHORTCUTS BLOG

A SIDEWAYS LOOK AT THE NEWS

NSA recruitment drive goes horribly wrong

Staff from the National Security Agency got more than they bargained for when they attempted to recruit students to their organisation earlier this week ...

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A demonstrator holds a sign with a photograph of Edward Snowden during 4 July celebrations in Boston, Massachusetts.

Photograph: Brian Snyder/REUTERS

On Tuesday, the National Security Agency called at the University of Wisconsin on a recruitment drive.

Attending the session was [Madiha R Tahir](#), a journalist studying a language course at the university. She asked the squirming recruiters a few uncomfortable questions about the activities of [NSA](#): which countries the agency considers to be "adversaries", and if being a good liar is a qualification for getting a job at the [NSA](#).

She has posted a recording of the session on Soundcloud, which you can hear above, and posted a rough transcript on her blog, [The Mob and the Multitude](#). Here are some highlights.

The session begins ...

Tahir: "Do you consider [Germany and the countries that the NSA has been spying upon](#) to be adversaries, or are you, right now, not speaking the truth?"

Recruiter 1: "You can define adversary as 'enemy' and, clearly, Germany is not our enemy. But would we have foreign national interests from an intelligence perspective on what's going on across the globe? Yeah, we do."

Tahir: "So by 'adversaries', you actually mean anybody and everybody. There is nobody, then, by your definition that is not an adversary. Is that correct?"

Recruiter 1: "That is not correct."

Recruiter 2: "... for us, our business is apolitical, OK? We do not generate the intelligence requirements. They are levied on us ... We might use the word 'target'."

Tahir: "I'm just surprised that for language analysts, you're incredibly imprecise with your language. And it just doesn't seem to be clear."

Later ...

Tahir: "... this is a recruiting session and you are telling us things that aren't true. And we also know that [the NSA took down brochures and factsheets after the Snowden revelations](#) because those factsheets also had severe inaccuracies and untruths in them, right? So how are we supposed to believe what you're saying?"

Even later ...

Tahir: "I think the question here is do you actually think about the ramifications of the work that you do, which is deeply problematic, or do you just dress up in costumes and get drunk?" [A reference to an earlier comment the recruiter made about [NSA](#) employees working hard and going to the bar to do

karaoke.]

Recruiter 2: "... reporting the info in the right context is so important because the consequences of bad political decisions by our policymakers is something we all suffer from."

Unnamed female student: "And people suffer from the misinformation that you pass along so you should take responsibility as well."

Later still ...

Male student: "General Alexander [head of the NSA] also lied in front of Congress."

Recruiter 1: "I don't believe that he did."

Male student: "Probably because access to the Guardian is restricted on the Department of Defence's computers. I am sure they don't encourage people like you to actually think about these things. Thank God for a man like Edward Snowden who your organisation is now part of a manhunt trying to track down, trying to put him in a little hole somewhere for the rest of his life. Thank God they exist."

And finally ...

Recruiter 2: "This job isn't for everybody, you know ..."

Tahir: "So is this job for liars? Is this what you're saying? Because, clearly, you're not able to give us forthright answers. I mean, given the way the NSA has behaved, given the fact that we've been lied to as Americans, given the fact that factsheets have been pulled down because they clearly had untruths in them, given the fact that Clapper and Alexander lied to Congress – is that a qualification for being in the NSA? Do you have to be a good liar?"

Recruiter 1: "I don't believe the NSA is telling complete lies. And I do believe that you know, I mean people can, you can read a lot of different things that are, um, portrayed as fact and that doesn't make them fact just because they're in newspapers."

Unnamed female student: "Or intelligence reports."

Recruiter 1: "That's not really our purpose here today and I think if you're not interested in that ... there are people here who are probably interested in a language career."

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