

Carter: Snowden's leaks 'good for Americans to know'



In this clip from Capital Download with Susan Page, President Jimmy Carter explains why he thinks former NSA employee Edward Snowden did a good thing for the country by leaking documents. Susan Page, Shannon Rae Green, Chris Moriono

Susan Page, USA TODAY [\(/staff/1198/susan-page\)](https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2014/03/24/susan-page/1198/) 7:25 p.m. EDT March 24, 2014

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NEW YORK -- Former president Jimmy Carter defended the disclosures by fugitive NSA contractor Edward Snowden on Monday, saying revelations that U.S. intelligence agencies were collecting meta-data of Americans' phone calls and e-mails have been "probably constructive in the long run."

(Photo: Robert Deutsch, USA TODAY)

Carter, 89, was interviewed on USA TODAY's Capital Download about his new book, *A Call To Action: Women, Religion, Violence, and Power*, being published Tuesday. He discussed the need to change the way the U.S. military handles sexual abuse cases, his correspondence with Pope Francis, his grandson's campaign for governor of Georgia, and how he thinks Hillary Clinton would make a good president.

Dozens remain missing in Wash.

And he described how concerned he is that his own e-mails are being monitored by intelligence agencies prompted him to type or write letters when he has a personal message for a foreign leader, then to mail them. Even then, he suspects the letters might be scrutinized when they pass through U.S. embassies.

"I think it's wrong," he said of the NSA program. "I think it's an intrusion on one of the basic human rights of Americans, is to have some degree of privacy if we don't want other people to read what we communicate."

Does he view Snowden, now granted asylum in Russia, as a hero or a traitor?

"There's no doubt that he broke the law and that he would be susceptible, in my opinion, to prosecution if he came back here under the law," he said. "But I think it's good for Americans to know the kinds of things that have been revealed by him and others -- and that is that since 9/11 we've gone too far in intrusion on the privacy that Americans ought to enjoy as a right of citizenship."

Carter cautioned that he didn't have information about whether some of the disclosures "may have hurt our security or individuals that work in security," adding, "If I knew that, then I may feel differently." And he said Snowden shouldn't be immune from prosecution for his actions.

"I think it's inevitable that he should be prosecuted and I think he would be prosecuted" if he returned to the United States, the former president said. "But I don't think he ought to be executed as a traitor or any kind of extreme punishment like that."

In his new book, published by Simon & Schuster, Carter details human rights abuses against women and girls around the world, often justified in the name of the Bible, the Koran and other religious texts. He called the issue "the most serious and unaddressed worldwide challenge," in the developing world and the United States.

He expressed fears that the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan by the end of this year would reverse many of the gains made there in the treatment of women and girls.

"I am concerned," he said. "I think the long occupation of the United States in Afghanistan and the evolution of the right of some girls to go to school has maybe decreased the adverse consequences of Taliban domination. I don't think it will come back as bad as it was in the past, but I think it still exists."

Carter, who endorsed Barack Obama in the 2008 Democratic presidential campaign, spoke highly of Hillary Rodham Clinton, the candidate he didn't endorse then. "I think Hillary has done a good job, obviously, as secretary of State and I think she obviously knows politics as well as anybody in America -- she and her husband together -- and I think she would make a good president."

As his 90th birthday approaches this year, he offered some thoughts on his legacy.

"One is peace," he said. "I kept peace when I was president and I try to promote peace between other people and us, and between countries that were potentially at war, between Israel and Egypt for instance. . . . I think human rights and peace are the two things I'd like to be remembered for -- as well as being a good grandfather." And he laughed.

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