

# The world must hear from Edward Snowden again

The White House and its media allies are gradually undermining the NSA whistleblower. The cause of liberty needs his advocacy



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In the statement released by WikiLeaks, Snowden claimed the US president had employed the 'old, bad tools of political aggression'. Photograph: Reuters/The Guardian

In the case of Edward Snowden and the secret surveillance abuses that he has exposed, it's us against them. But who is "us" and who is "them?"

This started out as a story of government spying programs exposed by a daring whistleblower, akin to the famous Pentagon Papers of 1971. This clearly pitted "us", the citizens and residents of the United States, against "them", an abusive, unaccountable government violating our rights and our constitution in secret. The citizens of other countries who had their rights violated by NSA spying, such as in Europe

and, now we learn, Brazil, also became part of that "us".

But over the last few weeks powerful media outlets, mirroring the efforts of the US government, have shifted the narrative to more convenient terrain. "Us" now means "America", led by our national security state, which – if possibly overzealous sometimes – is trying to protect "us". "Them" is our adversaries – terrorists, of course, but also any government that is independent enough to be branded as "anti-American". And Edward Snowden – the "fugitive leaker" at best, or "traitorous spy" at worst – has, in some unexplained manner, helped "them", and seems to be getting help from "them" (in this case, governments that are "anti-American"; that is, independent of Washington).

Never mind that even Russia didn't want to get involved in the whole thing, and insisted that Snowden could only stay there if he would "cease his work aimed at damaging our American partners", the cold war rhetoric is too irresistible for journalists steeped in its patriotic fervor. Like Mike Meyers' Austin Powers, who woke up after a decades' long nap and didn't know that the cold war was over, they are ready to do battle with America's "enemies".

One of the most influential human rights organizations in the world, Amnesty International, didn't buy this media narrative. Last Tuesday, it accused the US government of "gross violations of [Snowden's] human rights", for trying to block him from applying for political asylum. Amnesty declared:

"It appears he is being charged by the US government primarily for revealing its – and other governments' – unlawful actions that violate human rights ...

"No one should be charged under any law for disclosing information of human rights violations ... Snowden is a whistleblower. He has disclosed issues of enormous public interest in the US and around the world."

The leading media outlets virtually ignored this voice and the legal issues that it raised.

The media can often determine what most people think on most issues, if given enough time and insufficient opposition. So, it is not surprising that the number of people who think that Snowden "did the right thing" has fallen over the past few weeks.

At this point, there is only one person who can turn this around: that is Edward Snowden himself. He has recorded only one interview, the one with Glenn Greenwald in which he took responsibility for the disclosures. It was a brilliant interview: he was crystal clear – morally, politically, and rhetorically.

"I'm no different from anybody else. I don't have special skills. I'm just another guy who sits there day to day in the office, watches what's happening and goes, 'This is something that's not our place to decide, the public needs to decide whether these programs and

policies are right or wrong."

The sincerity of his appeal convinced millions that he was "us" – and that the people who now want to put him behind bars for life are "them".

It is understandable why he hasn't given any media interviews since then. He didn't expose these programs, despite some ridiculous punditry to the contrary, to promote himself. He wants the focus to be on the crimes committed in secret by government, not on him. But sometimes, there is no avoiding center stage.

Snowden is the only person right now who can reach hundreds of millions of people with a truthful message. The media is currently hungry for his words; they are eager to ignore most of the other truth-tellers, like Amnesty International; or to disparage them. They have demonized Julian Assange, who has yet to be even charged with a single crime, not even a misdemeanor. They will eventually destroy Snowden if he does not forcefully speak out and defend himself.

This has practical, as well as political, consequences. On Friday, Venezuela and Nicaragua offered asylum to Snowden, followed by Bolivia on Saturday. And there are an unknown number of other countries – including Ecuador – that would almost certainly grant him asylum if he showed up there. There are a number of ways for him to fly to these places without passing over any country that takes orders from Washington. But will the US government violate international law again, and risk innocent lives, by trying to force down a plane in international air space?

This decision may depend on the Obama team's forecast of how the media would portray such a crime. If Snowden explains to the world why his actions were a legitimate and eminently justifiable exposure of government criminality, the White House may think twice about further illegal and possibly forceful efforts to block Snowden's right to political asylum.

The Obama team did not comment on the offers of asylum. This was very smart, since it was a safe bet that the media would respond for them, framing the issue not as one of independent governments exercising their right and obligation to offer political asylum to a whistleblower, but rather "them" trying to poke a finger in the eye of the United States.

But there are millions of Americans, and many more throughout the world, who can see through this crusty cold war retreat. Snowden can reach many millions more with the truth. He needs to speak – not only to save himself, but also future whistleblowers whom the Obama administration wants to silence by punishing him. What is at stake is the whole cause of human rights, especially the right to asylum. The citizens of the world need to see that triumph over the intimidation from those who believe that raw power is all that counts.



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