Topic for Media Analysis Paper:

Whistleblowing is incredibly dangerous for the individual, and their family, and can lead to the individual being criminally prosecuted. However, there actions can have tremendous impacts on the very programs they are exposing. In the case of Edward Snowden, by alerting the public of these unethical government programs, he has begun the conversation on what we would sacrifice in order to ensure our safety.

In Europe there have been court preceding’s by the European Court of Human Rights which have deemed Tempora, the British surveillance program Snowden revealed, unlawful and have in turn had to make drastic changes (Leonard, 2015, 12). Furthermore, various groups such as Don’t Spy on Me and Big Brother Watch, with the intentions of rallying for less government surveillance, have gained popularity in the last few years since Snowden’s leaks. These groups and the new court hearings about these surveillance programs have all around shifted public opinion from doing anything for a nations security to that of distrust for its own government. Where whistleblower approval ratings were previously at a low forty percent, it has risen to ratings in the high sixties. All of these consequences have led to not only more public awareness about surveillance but also it has resulted in even more leaks, with a total of eleven large leaks since Edward Snowden spoke out. However, Britain was not the only country to face the consequences of Snowden’s leaks.

In addition to Britain being under fire by the European Court of Human Rights, the United States is also in the spotlight for potentially having violated international law. Based on the information released by Snowden, the United States are in violation of article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), meaning that the UN Human Rights Committee could easily deem Stellarwind, the NSA surveillance program, unconstitutional (Sinha, 2014, 862). Article 17 states, “[n]o one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation”. Based on this clause alone, the United States in in violation of unlawful interference of the privacy of every individual whom it spies on. While both of these claims, by international bodies, against these countries have not resulted in any new laws coming into place it is clear that changes need to be made.

Based on these claims against both the United States and Britain, several groups, such as Don’t Spy on Me and Big Brother Watch, have come up with various proposals as to what the government should change about these surveillance programs. The single most popular proposition is that governments should be more transparent about these programs. Whereas transparency may make these government programs less effective, the general public would at least be informed on the sacrifices they are making for their safety and would result in proper discourse on the legality of these programs (Reidenberg, 2014, 49). The second proposal is that there be laws instated to set strict limits on the civilian data that can be accessed and stored. This would require passing a stricter version of the Privacy Act of 1974 so as to further restrict the governments access to data. The final proposition is one which European Court of Human Rights hearing is attempting to enforce, which is that these governments are held accountable for the privacy violations against its citizens. This would help to reform these programs and prevent further transgressions by large government surveillance systems.