

Edward Snowden: The Wikileaks Scandal

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It was May of 2013, on a flight to Hong Kong with a pocket full of flash drives, that Edward Snowden was preparing to make a decision that would change the way national cybersecurity worked in the United States and around the world. In our current age of technology, it is vastly important to prioritize security for individuals and conglomerates alike. When something like a person's identity or financial information are at stake, the concern for that person should be privacy and protection for their own well-being. When an entire Nation's affairs are suddenly broadcasted to the press, there are many more dangers that are involved. There are three major factors have changed the way we look at how to secure information communicated through the internet: Edward Snowden, Wikileaks, and the scandal that relates the two in a new era of cybersecurity.

Edward Snowden was born June 21st, 1983 in North Carolina to two federal employees. His father a U.S. Coast Guard Officer, and his mother a clerk at the U.S. District Court of Maryland. It was no surprise then, when Snowden also chose the path of federal employment. Initially enlisting in the US Army during the Iraq war, he was discharged after accruing fractures in both legs during training. Only a couple years later Snowden found his way back into federal work when he accepted an offer at the CIA in global communications.(CNN) Through this job his hard work and natural computer savviness, Snowden rose through the ranks rather quickly. This upward mobility eventually gave Snowden classified access to millions of documents regarding US affairs and security. According to Snowden "Anyone with a badge and computer access working in this department could have accessed these documents". Even with their high security, the ease of which someone could look at, modify, or even copy these documents seemed rather lenient.

When Edward had decided to join the military in the early years it was not for lack of better employment options. He had a strong moral obligation to fight for his country. He was a patriot in his own words and felt like it was his duty, as had been his father and grandfathers before him, to serve. After being discharged, he did not lose this morality towards patriotism, he only maneuvered his sights and goals towards other areas where he could benefit. When he secured his job at the CIA, he never imagined to see all of the ongoings of the US government behind closed doors that the average American would not have even imagined. He was troubled by the information he was able to gather on not just the Iraq war, where during the Obama administration he witnessed innocent civilians unnecessarily become casualties, but also the way the government was spying on its own people. From the start Snowden knew he had to do something; he just wasn't sure what.

Working in this environment, most of his coworkers had become numb to the intel they crossed. They were aware of the government meddling but no longer recognized it as unjust, immoral or even interesting. Snowden felt it was his job and duty to the American people to not leave them blindsided but the governments invasion of their privacy. The ultimate motivation for him was when the director of the NSA specifically said to the country's citizens on a national broadcast that they were not spying on its people. This blatant lie pushed Snowden to make his final decision to leak the information that would hopefully create changes within the system that the American people relied on and trusted.

This is when, in 2013 on Snowden's trip to Hong Kong, he made the choice of his life, to hand over high security documents from the United States NSA to the press. According to the sources who received this intel, there were between 7000 and 10000 documents between the files

handed over. The United States has estimated that over 1 million documents were stolen, but to this day there is no accurate number that can be accounted for. Snowden's intention was to release information that would inform the American people of their government's meddling in their private conversations between phone and internet use. He couldn't have anticipated the drastic difference in opinions that resulted from his hopeful act.(The Wired)

To understand how critical the release of the NSA documents was, it is important to realize the type of audience it was released to. Snowden did not go directly to a newspaper or television program. Instead he used a media sources called Wikileaks. This organization was started in 2006 as a means to bring important news and information to the people. It is an international non-profit organization that publishes news leaks and classified media provided by anonymous sources. Julian Assange is the founder of Wikileaks and defends his venture by stating that "a worldwide movement of mass leaking is the most cost-effective political intervention". Through this source anonymous leakers could send information to be published by the press who are legally protected by the first amendment. Assange believed that the only way to show people the truth was to show them what was being hidden. Because Assange conducted his business outside the US it was very difficult to prosecute him on any chargers. Espionage laws in general in the US are very outdated and created problems when trying to indict Wikileaks or Assange. (Baltimore Sun)

Assange and his journalists took no time scouring through the documents to find evidence of illegal surveillance, and hacking by the US and British governments. They went straight to the press and media outlets with the information. It was released that Verizon had cooperated with the United States demand that all phone records be turned over to the NSA on a daily basis. Reports followed of the NSA collecting information from Facebook, Google,

Microsoft and Yahoo by directly tapping into their servers. After further investigation, the US was found to be participating in a hacking that specifically targeted China and Hong Kong.

During this exposure of US secrets, Snowden had already formulated a plan with Assange under the assumption that he would immediately be pursued by the US government. He was right. Assange and his colleagues were able to secure him a flight to Russia, where he would remain ultimately untouchable by the US. His decision to seek asylum in another country did nothing to paint the picture of him as a martyr in America. It was easy for the US to expose him as a traitor to his country without him available to defend himself. He would eventually complete several interviews with American journalists to support his case for a revelation to the American people. In December of 2013 Snowden told the Washington Post “I didn’t want to change society, I wanted to give society a change to determine if it should change itself.”(The Hill).

It still remains unclear if Snowden’s actions created a change in societies views of the “big brother” scenario. Some hail him as a hero while other accuse him of treason and theft. Mega companies such as Facebook and Google have made changes to their own software that increase protection and monitoring of any interference.(Bromwich) The NSA has made different statements regarding their actions and future preventative measures. Some responses include defending the US intelligence agency saying “Among some people, this perception led to increased suspicion of the intelligence community, which is unfortunate, since our intelligence professionals are doing really hard, important and sometimes dangerous work to prevent terror attacks.”(The Hill) Perhaps Snowden’s release and Wikileaks aggressive reporting on the information has set the US back when it comes to its perception by the public.

When it comes to the morality of the Snowden and Wikileaks actions it necessary to take them as two separate entities. Snowden, as a citizen of the united states and a government

employee could be charged with theft of government property. Although his intentions might have been for the good of the people, legally speaking he did break the law. There were other alternatives to spreading the information he discovered and maybe he should have sought out those paths beforehand. Snowden thought he needed to expose the exact truth or society would not understand how their rights were being violated. In his effort to do so he also exposed secrets of the United States government that put the country as a whole in a national security crisis.

With the information already leaked to Wikileaks, as a media outlet they are protected in their right to reveal that information to the public. (Light) Governments do sometimes need to keep information about their tactics private in order to evade other conflict between countries and especially terrorist acts. Wikileaks acted within their rights however, and the United States and British governments needed to take this as a lesson in national security measures going forward.

Even as the two worked together in the beginning, their relationship did not remain positive or in agreement through all of the information leaked. In 2016, Wikileaks decided to post information related to the Clinton campaign that would ultimately sabotage the candidate's chances of presidency. Snowden was quick to condemn the website for its leak, which Assange quickly assumed was Snowden "him of pandering to Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton." (Peterson)

The scandal between Snowden and Wikileaks changed internet use and communication forever for the entire world. Governments and citizens alike are more aware of the protections necessary to keep their information private and secure. Although there are still many sectors of the government that need high priority security in order to keep the country safe, it was definitely

eye opening for American's to realize the measures their security agencies were willing to take, and possibility give them a say in how the government uses its power in the future.

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