**Snowden in Wonderland**

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PATROTISM can be a very peculiar thing that only a mind as sublimely subtle and comical as that of Lewis Carroll might be equipped to reason out. Case in point: renowned whistleblower Edward Snowden resides in exile for disclosing to fellow US citizens massive state surveillance crimes committed against them.  
  
A few months ago, Snowden also had all royalties to his autobiographical book Permanent Record seized because he failed to submit it for clearance to the very agencies whose gross misdeeds he was exposing. All this illogicality is understandable if youlook at it in just the right way.  
  
If we were state security czars who routinely violated our oaths to the constitution, we too likely would conceal it in the name of national security, which absolves everything. Disregard the fact that federal courts in 2016 and again in 2020 ruled that the unbridled surveillance programmes Snowden exposed were illegal and that intelligence leaders deliberately deceived the public.  
  
It is worth revisiting the book in the af termath of the court decision to scoop up royalties and speaking fees. At least he got his side of the story out. Snowden didn`t funnel information to foreign agents nor did it for the bucks and bling. He gave up a six-figure salaried sinecure to reveal his bosses` lawless intrusions into all our lives. Meanwhile, the urbane lawbreakers Snowden exposed go on pocketing their handsome pay and pensions, nursing grudges against spoilsport whistleblowers and prattling on major news broadcasts.  
  
This son of a US Coast Guard engineer and a Mayflower-descendant mother hardly fits the profile of a turncoat. As a geeky teen, he hacked into the Los Alamos weapons lab site and then alerted the lab to its vulnerability.  
  
Af ter 9/11, Snowden enlisted in the army but suffered an injury in training. At 22 he `didn`t have any` politics, just a sense of the internet as a wild new frontier. The intelligence service, where public and private entities now merged, hired the techie just as it transitioned from `targeted surveillance of individuals to mass surveillance of entire populations`.  
  
A contractor for the CIA at first, Snowden eventually worked for the National Security Agency (NSA) where he abetted `the agency`s ultimate dream which is permanency to store all of the files it has ever collected or produced in perpetuity and so create a perfect memory. The permanent record`.  
  
A post-9/11 programme under George W.  
  
Bush urged the NSA to collect data without restriction but was outed. The ensuing reforms, Snowden found, were mere ruses to re-enable the programmes so that any NSA spook could `instantly track everybody witha phone or computer, know who they are, where they are, what they were doing with whom, and what they had ever done in the past`. Snowden foresaw the rise of a Robocop world where `If you ever get out of line we`ll use your private life against you`.  
  
What Snowden beheld in the next few years was a `cynical attempt to turn terror into a permanent danger that required permanent vigilance enforced by unquestionable authority`.  
  
In this loco Alice in Wonderland atmosphere, the NSA defended itself against a civil liberties lawsuit on the grounds that no one could not prove the agency snooped on their clients. The court obligingly only recognised evidence the government permitted, not leaked documents, which were classified and so inadmissible.  
  
Theintelligencecommunityexistedabove the law. GCHQ, the NSA`s UK counterpart, deployed a programme that captured a snapshot every five minutes of everyone chatting on Yahoo. Another US programme XKEYSCORE could burglarise computerrecords and leave no trace.  
  
How to rein it all in? Snowden opted against WikiLeaks because it resorted to data dumps, without careful contextualising. Turning to certain press luminaries, `I would be aiding and abetting an act of journalism`which is indistinguishable these nervewracking days from treason. The US Espionage Act forbids any chance of defence since it disregards changes in law caused by Snowden or the beneficial civic ef fect of public debate following his actions.  
  
Despite the US Fourth Amendment protecting against unreasonable searches and seizures, `you surrender your privacy rights in the very act of using modern technologies`. Marooned in Moscow in 2013 af ter his passport was revoked while he was en route to Ecuador, Snowden now expresses more faithinencrypted smartphones thaninlegislative safeguards, though he views the 2016 EU General Data Protection Regulation as a step in the right privacy-protecting direction.  
  
He awaits an unlikely outbreak of logic and reason. Though getting a helping hand via Julian Assange at a crucial moment, Snowden disapprovingly referred to Assange`s `feral opposition to central power` whichindicatesnotevenheistotallyimmune to government smear campaigns.  The writers are authors of No C|ean H and s, Parables of Permanent War andotherbooks.