



BY
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WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...?

...EDWARD SNOWDEN?

EDWARD SNOWDEN'S STORY REMAINS relevant today given the on-going number of public leaders accused of mishandling classified information and violating the Espionage Act. A decade ago in 2013, Edward Snowden leaked highly classified information to the media exposing large-scale government spying on American citizens without their knowledge or consent. His disclosures at the time sparked heated debates about privacy, security, and government oversight. At that time, Edward Snowden was facing criminal charges for mishandling classified information and violating America's Espionage Act. Fast forward to 2023, former President Trump now faces criminal charges related to the improper retention of classified information and violating the Espionage Act. Much as Edward Snowden's classified information in 2013 caused great public alarm and concern, allegations that former President Trump willfully retained documents containing the nation's most sensitive secrets (including nuclear pro-



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(NSA) operations to the media. **The Espionage Act of 1917 is a law that makes it a crime to share or gather information related to the national security of the United States.** It was originally passed during World War I to prevent people from giving away military secrets and has since been used to prosecute individuals for sharing sensitive information during the Cold War and after 9/11. Besides Edward Snowden and former President Trump, a number of other notable figures charged with violating the Espionage Act include Chelsea Manning, Julian Assange, and, most recently, Massachusetts's Air National Guardsman Jack Teixeira for allegedly posting classified military information on social media webpages. (See March-June issue of *thenetwork*.)

Edward Snowden worked for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and later worked as a contractor for the National Security Agency (NSA). As a result of his work, he held a "position of trust" at the NSA that afforded him exceptional access to classified programs and information. The same situation is true with Donald Trump. As former President of the United States, he enjoyed incompatible access. Holding "positions of trust" often corresponds to attaining security

clearances that enable access to information that is otherwise restricted for national security purposes. **Snowden publicly revealed to the media that the United States government was secretly pursuing the means to collect every single phone call, text message, and email.** His staggering leak described an unprecedented government system of mass surveillance that had the ability to pry into the private lives of every person on earth. Many people believe Snowden was justified to leak the government's secret surveillance program. Some believe he should even enjoy "whistleblower" legal protections from the government because of the public's overriding interests and right to privacy. For those with Libertarian views, Snowden simply exposed the United States government's encroachment on and violations of individual liberties. On the flip side, some view him as a traitor. He betrayed his position of trust, and he betrayed his sacred obligation to safeguard classified information.

Snowden's case provides us with an exceptional example of just how divided the public can see the same character—as either a villain, or a hero. In 2019, during a YouTube Podcast (with Joe Rogan), he said he believed that "the public had a right to know about the extent of the NSA's reach". This remains his story and defense, even if he hasn't had his day in court to defend his position.

Edward Snowden fled the United States after he leaked classified information. His passport was cancelled, so he ended up spending 6-weeks in a Moscow airport. In 2013, he was granted temporary asylum by Russia. According to Reuters, in September 2022, Russia President Vladimir Putin granted Edward Snowden full citizenship status. Putin, a former Russian spy chief, said that Snowden, who keeps a low profile while

living in Russia, was wrong to leak U.S. secrets, but that he was not a traitor.

So why would Russia grant citizenship to Edward Snowden? Perhaps Russia accepted him to express their disapproval of the United States' surveillance policies. Russia is also able to use him as a power move against the United States. Russia's stance is that he was not spying for any country, but rather defending human rights.

Russia may want to use Snowden as a pawn in the game of nuclear disarmament, or they may have hopes of using him in terms of trying to get out from under U.S. sanctions. Meanwhile, the U.S. has sought his return for years because he exposed how the NSA conducted mass surveillance on American citizens. If Snowden comes back to the United States, it is uncertain what kind of reception he would receive. He might face jail time for espionage and surveillance violations. Or he might receive some kind of leniency for revealing government secrets.

Meanwhile, former president Trump has long denied having any beneficial connections with Russia. In fact, he has emphatically called allegations that he favors Russia the great "Russia Hoax". Both the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and Department of Justice have since concluded there was no collusion between Russia and the Trump campaign in 2016. Still, Russia's ongoing support for spies and traitors of the U.S. is likely part of a strategy to weaken American democracy and undermine the United States' influence globally. By creating political divisions within the U.S., President Putin likely hopes to weaken America's power on the world stage and increase his own country's influence.

In conclusion, Edward Snowden and Former President Donald Trump have both provided solid examples of the potential consequences and sensitivities of handling classified information. History will one day tell the whole story. ■



↑ Headquarters of the NSA at Fort Meade, Maryland

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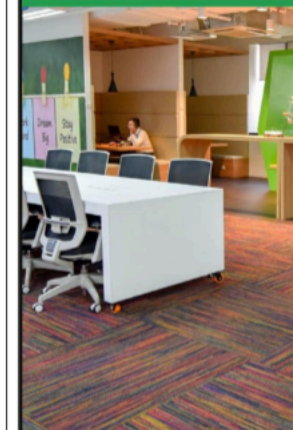


grams) after he left office, is of significant concern to the U.S. government and has tremendous world-wide media attention.

Edward Snowden was accused of violating the Espionage Act because he intentionally leaked classified information about National Security Agency



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