

Is Edward Snowden a Radical?

By [William Blum](#)

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Is Edward Snowden a radical?

The dictionary defines a radical as “an advocate of political and social revolution”, the adjective form being “favoring or resulting in extreme or revolutionary changes”.

That doesn’t sound like Snowden as far as what has been publicly revealed. In common usage, the term “radical” usually connotes someone or something that goes beyond the generally accepted boundaries of socio-political thought and policies; often used by the Left simply to denote more extreme than, or to the left of, a “liberal”.

In his [hour-long interview on NBC](#), May 28, in Moscow, Snowden never expressed, or even implied, any thought – radical or otherwise – about United States foreign policy or the capitalist economic system under which we live, the two standard areas around which many political discussions in the US revolve. In fact, after reading a great deal by and about Snowden this past year, I have no idea what his views actually are about these matters. To be sure, in the context of the NBC interview, capitalism was not at all relevant, but US foreign policy certainly was.

Snowden was not asked any direct questions about foreign policy, but if I had been in his position I could not have replied to several of the questions without bringing it up. More than once the interview touched upon the question of whether the former NSA contractor’s actions had caused “harm to the United States”. Snowden said that he’s been asking the entire past year to be presented with evidence of such harm and has so far received nothing. I, on the other hand, as a radical, would have used the opportunity to educate the world-wide audience about how the American empire is the greatest threat to the world’s peace, prosperity, and environment; that anything to slow down the monster is to be desired; and that throwing a wrench into NSA’s surveillance gears is eminently worthwhile toward this end; thus, “harm” indeed should be the goal, not something to apologize for.

Edward added that the NSA has been unfairly “demonized” and that the agency is composed of “good people”. I don’t know what to make of this.

When the war on terrorism was discussed in the interview, and the question of whether Snowden’s actions had hurt that effort, he failed to take the opportunity to point out the obvious and absolutely essential fact – that US foreign policy, by its very nature, regularly and routinely creates anti-American terrorists.

When asked what he’d say to President Obama if given a private meeting, Snowden had no response at all to make. I, on the other hand, would say to Mr. Obama: “Mr. President, in your time in office you’ve waged war against seven countries – Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan,

Somalia, Yemen, Libya and Syria. This makes me wonder something. With all due respect, sir: What is wrong with you?"

A radical – one genuine and committed – would not let such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity pass by unused. Contrary to what his fierce critics at home may believe, Edward Snowden is not seriously at war with America, its government or its society. Does he have a real understanding, analysis, or criticism of capitalism or US foreign policy? Does he think about what people could be like under a better social system? Is he, I wonder, even anti-imperialist?

And he certainly is not a conspiracy theorist, or at least keeps it well hidden. He was asked about 9-11 and replied:

The 9/11 commission ... when they looked at all the classified intelligence from all the different intelligence agencies, they found that we had all of the information we needed ... to detect this plot. We actually had records of the phone calls from the United States and out. The CIA knew who these guys were. The problem was not that we weren't collecting information, it wasn't that we didn't have enough dots, it wasn't that we didn't have a haystack, it was that we did not understand the haystack that we had.

Whereas I might have pointed out that the Bush administration may have ignored the information because they wanted something bad – perhaps of unknown badness – to happen in order to give them the justification for all manner of foreign and domestic oppression they wished to carry out. And did. (This scenario of course excludes the other common supposition, that it was an "inside job", in which case collecting information on the perpetrators would not have been relevant.)

The entire segment concerning 9/11 was left out of the television broadcast of the interview, although some part of it was shown later during a discussion. This kind of omission is of course the sort of thing that feeds conspiracy theorists.

All of the above notwithstanding, I must make it clear that I have great admiration for the young Mr. Snowden, for what he did and for how he expresses himself. He may not be a radical, but he is a hero. His moral courage, nerve, composure, and technical genius are magnificent. I'm sure the NBC interview won him great respect and a large number of new supporters. I, in Edward's place, would be even more hated by Americans than he is, even if I furthered the radicalization of more of them than he has. However, I of course would never have been invited onto mainstream American television for a long interview in prime time. (Not counting my solitary 15 minutes of fame in 2006 courtesy of Osama bin Laden; a gigantic fluke happening.)

Apropos Snowden's courage and integrity, it appears that something very important has not been emphasized in media reports: In the interview, he took the Russian government to task for a new law requiring bloggers to register – the same government which holds his very fate in their hands.

Who is more exceptional: The United States or Russia?

I was going to write a commentary about President Obama's speech to the graduating class at the US Military Academy (West Point) on May 28. When he speaks to a military audience

the president is usually at his most nationalistic, jingoist, militaristic, and American-exceptionalist – wall-to-wall platitudes. But this talk was simply TOO nationalistic, jingoist, militaristic, and American-exceptionalist. (“I believe in American exceptionalism with every fiber of my being.”) To go through it line by line in order to make my usual wise-ass remarks, would have been just too painful. However, if you’re in a masochistic mood and wish to read it, [it can be found here](#).

Instead I offer you part of a [commentary from Mr. Jan Oberg](#), Danish director of the Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research in Lund, Sweden:

What is conspicuously lacking in the President’s West Point speech?

1. Any reasonably accurate appraisal of the world and the role of other nations.
2. A sense of humility and respect for allies and other countries in this world.
3. Every element of a grand strategy for America for its foreign and security policy and some kind of vision of what a better world would look like. This speech with all its tired, self-aggrandising rhetoric is a thin cover-up for the fact that there is no such vision or overall strategy.
4. Some little hint of reforms of existing institutions or new thinking about globalisation and global democratic decision-making.
5. Ideas and initiatives – stretched-out hands – to help the world move towards conflict-resolution in crisis areas such as Ukraine, Syria, Libya, China-Japan and Iran. Not a trace of creativity.

Ironically, on May 30 the *Wall Street Journal* published a long essay by Leon Aron, a Russia scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington. The essay took Russian president Vladimir Putin to task for claiming that Russia is exceptional. The piece was headed:

“Why Putin Says Russia Is Exceptional”

“Such claims have often heralded aggression abroad and harsh crackdowns at home.”

It states: “To Mr. Putin, in short, Russia was exceptional because it was emphatically not like the modern West – or not, in any event, like his caricature of a corrupt, morally benighted Europe and U.S. This was a bad omen, presaging the foreign policy gambits against Ukraine that now have the whole world guessing about Mr. Putin’s intentions.”

So the *Wall Street Journal* has no difficulty in ascertaining that a particular world leader sees his country as “exceptional”. And that such a perception can lead that leader or his country to engage in aggression abroad and crackdowns at home. The particular world leader so harshly judged in this manner by the *Wall Street Journal* is named Vladimir Putin, not Barack Obama. There’s a word for this kind of analysis – It’s called *hypocrisy*.

“Hypocrisy is anything whatever may deceive the cleverest and most penetrating man, but the least wide-awake of children recognizes it, and is revolted by it, however ingeniously it may be disguised.” – Leo Nikolaevich Tolstoi, (1828-1910) Russian writer

Is hypocrisy a moral failing or a failing of the intellect?

The New Cold War is getting to look more and more like the old one, wherein neither side allows the other to get away with any propaganda point. Just compare any American television network to the Russian station broadcast in the United States – RT (formerly *Russia Today*). The contrast in coverage of the same news events is remarkable, and the stations attack and make fun of each other by name.

Another, even more important, feature to note is that in Cold War I the United States usually had to consider what the Soviet reaction would be to a planned American intervention in the Third World. This often served as a brake to one extent or another on Washington's imperial adventures. Thus it was that only weeks after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, the United States bombed and invaded Panama, inflicting thousands of casualties and widespread destruction, for the flimsiest – bordering on the non-existent – of reasons. The hostile Russian reaction to Washington's clear involvement in the overthrow of the Ukrainian government in February of this year, followed by Washington's significant irritation and defensiveness toward the Russian reaction, indicates that this Cold War brake may have a chance of returning. And for this we should be grateful.

After the "communist threat" had disappeared and the foreign policy of the United States continued absolutely unchanged, it meant that the Cold War revisionists had been vindicated – the conflict had not been about containing an evil called "communism"; it had been about American expansion, imperialism and capitalism. If the collapse of the Soviet Union did not result in any reduction in the American military budget, but rather was followed by large increases, it meant that the Cold War – from Washington's perspective – had not been motivated by a fear of the Russians, but purely by ideology.

Lest we forget: Our present leaders can derive inspiration from other great American leaders.

White House tape recordings, April 25, 1972:

President Nixon: How many did we kill in Laos?

National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger: In the Laotian thing, we killed about ten, fifteen [thousand] ...

Nixon: See, the attack in the North [Vietnam] that we have in mind ... power plants, whatever's left – POL [petroleum], the docks ... And, I still think we ought to take the dikes out now. Will that drown people?

Kissinger: About two hundred thousand people.

Nixon: No, no, no ... I'd rather use the nuclear bomb. Have you got that, Henry?

Kissinger: That, I think, would just be too much.

Nixon: The nuclear bomb, does that bother you? ... I just want you to think big, Henry, for Christ's sake.

May 2, 1972:

Nixon: America is not defeated. We must not lose in Vietnam. ... The surgical operation theory is all right, but I want that place bombed to *smithereens*. If we draw the sword, we're

gonna bomb those bastards all over the place. Let it fly, *let it fly*.

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“Every ten years or so, the United States needs to pick up some small crappy little country and throw it against the wall, just to show the world we mean business.” – Michael Ledeen, former Defense Department consultant and holder of the Freedom Chair at the American Enterprise Institute

Help needed from a computer expert

This has been driving me crazy for a very long time. My printer doesn't print the document I ask it to print, but instead prints something totally unrelated. But what it prints is always something I've had some contact with, like an email I received or a document I read online, which I may or may not have saved on my hard drive, mostly not. It's genuinely weird.

Now, before I print anything, I close all other windows in my word processor (Word Perfect/Windows 7); I go offline; I specify printing only the current page, no multiple page commands. Yet, the printer usually still finds some document online and prints it.

At one point I cleared out all the printer caches, and that helped for a short while, but then the problem came back though the caches were empty.

I spoke to the printer manufacturer, HP, and they said it can't be the fault of the printer because the printer only prints what the computer tells it to print.

It must be the CIA or NSA. Help!

Notes

1. William Blum, *Killing Hope*, chapter 50
2. Jonah Goldberg, [“Baghdad Delenda Est, Part Two”](#), *National Review*, April 23, 2002

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Articles by: [William Blum](#)

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