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*Corporate Pressure isn't the Solution, It's the Problem*

## An Open Letter to Glenn Greenwald

by BILL BLUNDEN

It's Wednesday evening, June 18th, at 8:35pm and I just spent an hour listening to Glenn Greenwald speak at the Nourse Theater in downtown San Francisco as he kicked off his nation-wide book tour.

I think that anyone who attended would agree that he masterfully deconstructed several myths surrounding the Snowden revelations (e.g. Snowden is a Russian spy, Snowden is a narcissist, meta-data collection is not an invasion of privacy, the NSA programs collect data selectively, and mass interception is aimed at keeping us safe from terrorism). He sprinkled his presentation liberally with humor and kept the audience engaged. Yet when it came time to Glenn to discuss solutions he was nowhere near as explicit as he was with his earlier material. Given that he opted to forgo a public question and answer session; here I am.

Hello there Glenn.

### My [Annotated] Question

Recently a professor from Princeton, Martin Gilens, and a professor from Northwestern University, Benjamin Page, have published a paper entitled "Testing Theories of American Politics." The results of this research analytically support the conclusion that policy makers in D.C. respond primarily to economic elites and groups representing organized business interests.

This work can be seen as a natural outgrowth of existing research that's been done by Thomas Ferguson, who developed the *Investment Theory of Party Competition*, a formulation which postulates that our leaders are essentially beholden to corporate factions. Noam Chomsky has described this as the most accurate model for American politics. Gilens and Page also echo the findings of sociologists like G. William Domhoff at UC Santa Cruz and old-school journalists like Ferdinand Lundberg, who offer the same basic analysis: power resides in the private sector with those who control our resources.

Years ago when Congressman Otis Pike investigated the CIA he concluded that it was an obedient arm of the executive branch. And yes, accounts of a "rogue agency" are occasionally dusted off when the President needs plausible deniability but in general the spies in Langley do what they're told. Pike concluded that it wasn't just one or two bad apples in the barrel. He decided the whole barrel was bad. This no doubt explains why the government classified his report.

In a nutshell, then, the United States executive branch is being driven by corporate forces that transitively dictate the long-term strategic goals of the intelligence services. Activists like William Blum

have spent their lives investigating and carefully recording this reality. For additional illumination check out the War and Peace Studies performed by the Council on Foreign Relations during World War II on behalf of the State Department. It's a flat out recipe for neoliberal hegemony. As Canadian filmmaker Scott Noble demonstrated in his movie "Counter-Intelligence," the United States is part of a corporate empire and the intelligence services are the Praetorian Guard of this empire.

So Glenn, does this mean that addressing mass surveillance, and the mass subversion which enables it, will entail tackling the related problem of corporate state capture? Or, as Sheldon Wolin refers to it, the specter of *inverted totalitarianism*?

### **Glenn's Thoughts**

Glenn mentioned that the average person may feel powerless against the government, but they could turn to strong cryptography as a way to regain privacy.

He also acknowledged that while hi-tech companies don't care one jot about your privacy they do, however, care about their bottom lines. By seeking out other companies that offer more secure services the public could apply market pressure which would send hoards of angry hi-tech executives to the White House.

### **A Few Dreadful Caveats**

Encryption may be a good thing, but it's hardly a panacea. Specifically, mass subversion trumps strong cryptography every time. As a software engineer who has developed rootkits I can vouch for this. Zero-day exploits and forged certificates rule the day. I touched upon this in some detail in a Counterpunch essay ("Google's Shareholder Theater").

The NSA is currently building systems that hack, implant, and extract data from millions of machines at a time. This means rootkits deployed and managed on an industrial scale. It's just a tad bit naive to think that strong crypto will safeguard us from this sort of tomfoolery.

Then there's the matter of free markets, a fabled creature propagated by elements of the Libertarian crowd. In this case the train of reasoning is that some intrepid company will come to market with a relatively secure (read "surveillance resistant") product that users will flock to, creating market incentives for other companies to do likewise.

The bad news is that this has already happened, and we all know what became of Lavabit. In this world, the one we live in, fledgling companies acquiesce to the Deep State or they vanish into the memory hole.

Never mind the subtle, ubiquitous, backdoors. Heartbleed anyone? What better way to monitor sensitive information than to get people to adopt a technology that they presume is secure? As Cryptome's John Young comments: "Security is deception. Comsec a trap. Natsec the mother of secfuckers."

Large multinational companies know full well that they only need to provide the *perception* of security and the more susceptible users will come in droves, reinforcing quarterly earnings and satisfying the mandates of Wall Street. Trying to find a back door in an Intel processor? Good luck with that...

## **My Thoughts**

Finally, I don't think society should have to rely on hi-tech billionaires to support our interests in the halls of Washington. Corporate pressure is not the solution. Corporate pressure is the problem.

As I mentioned earlier, the fossil fuel industry, the defense industry with its appendages in hi-tech, and the plutocrats of Wall Street are largely directing the U.S. government. Our elected leaders are their proxies. The NSA's surveillance machine is but a small part of a much larger private sector data aggregation machine. Both systems exist to further the aims of the economic elite. Ed Snowden has confirmed as much. I believe his words were: "These programs were never about terrorism: they're about economic spying, social control, and diplomatic manipulation"

Certainly, there are technical aspects to the global surveillance apparatus and the mass subversion campaign that enables it. And there are also economic aspects. But, at its core, this is a political problem. We should not expect the oligarchs to willfully hobble themselves. Recall the forces of popular pressure behind Woman's Suffrage, the New Deal legislation, and Civil Rights. American citizens must politically mobilize, rise like lions from our collective haze of empty consumption and reality TV to retake (and remake) our government.

**Bill Blunden** is an independent investigator whose current areas of inquiry include information security, anti-forensics, and institutional analysis. He is the author of several books, including "The Rootkit Arsenal" and "Behold a Pale Farce: Cyberwar, Threat Inflation, and the Malware-Industrial Complex." Bill is the lead investigator at Below Gotham Labs.