

CRYPTOME

Greenwald Blames the Hostage

Silicon Valley Sells the Illusion of Security

By **Bill Blunden**, November 20, 2014

Yesterday the USA Freedom Act was blocked in the Senate as it failed to garner the 60 votes required to move forward. [Presumably](#) the bill would have imposed limits on NSA surveillance. [Careful scrutiny](#) of the bill's text however reveals yet another mere gesture of reform, one that would codify and entrench existing surveillance capabilities rather than eliminate them.

Glenn Greenwald, commenting from his perch at the *Intercept*, [opined](#):

“All of that illustrates what is, to me, the most important point from all of this: the last place one should look to impose limits on the powers of the U.S. government is . . . the U.S. government. Governments don't walk around trying to figure out how to limit their own power, and that's particularly true of empires.”

Anyone who followed the sweeping deregulation of the financial industry during the Clinton era, the [Gramm–Leach–Bliley Act](#) of 1999 which effectively repealed Glass-Steagall and the [Commodity Futures Modernization Act](#) of 2000, immediately sees through Greenwald's impromptu dogma. Let's not forget the energy market deregulation in California and subsequent [manipulation](#) that resulted in blackouts throughout the state. Ditto that for the latest roll back of [arms export controls](#) that opened up markets for the defense industry. And never mind all those hi-tech companies that want to [loosen H1-B restrictions](#).

The truth is that the government is more than happy to cede power and authority... just as long as doing so serves the corporate factions that have achieved [state capture](#). The “empire” Greenwald speaks of is a [corporate empire](#). In concrete analytic results that affirm Thomas Ferguson's [Investment Theory of Party Competition](#), researchers from Princeton and Northwestern University [conclude that](#):

“Multivariate analysis indicates that economic elites and organized groups representing business interests have substantial independent impacts on U.S. government policy, while average citizens and mass-based interest groups have little or no independent influence.”

Glenn's stance reveals a broader libertarian theme. One that the Koch brothers would no doubt find amenable: the government is suspect and efforts to rein in mass interception must therefore arise from the corporate entities. Greenwald appears to believe that [the market will solve everything](#). Specifically, he postulates that consumer demand for security will drive companies to offer products that protect user privacy, adopt “strong” encryption, etc.

The Primacy of Security Theater

Certainly large hi-tech companies care about quarterly earnings. That definitely explains all of the tax evasion, wage ceilings, and the slave labor. But these same companies would be hard pressed to actually protect user privacy because [spying on users is a fundamental part of their business model](#). Like government spies, corporate spies collect and monetize oceans of data.

Furthermore hi-tech players don't need to actually bullet-proof their products to win back customers. It's far **more cost effective to simply manufacture the perception of better security**: slap on some crypto, flood the news with public relation pieces, and get some government officials (e.g. [James Comey](#), [Robert Hannigan](#), and [Stewart Baker](#)) to whine visibly about the purported enhancements in order to lend the marketing campaign credibility. The techno-libertarians of Silicon Valley are masters of Security Theater.

Witness, if you will, Microsoft's litany of assurances about security over the years, followed predictably by an endless train of critical zero-day bugs. Faced with such dissonance it becomes clear that **"security" in high-tech is viewed as a public relations issue, a branding mechanism to boost profits**. Greenwald is underestimating the contempt that CEOs have for the credulity of their user base, much less their [own workers](#).

Does allegedly "strong" cryptography offer salvation? Cryptome's John Young thinks otherwise:

"Encryption is a citizen fraud, bastard progeny of national security, which offers malware insecurity requiring endless 'improvements' to correct the innately incorrigible. Its advocates presume it will empower users rather than subject them to ever more vulnerability to shady digital coders complicit with dark coders of law in exploiting fear, uncertainty and doubt."

Business interests, having lured customers in droves with a myriad of false promises, will go back to secretly cooperating with government spies as they always have: introducing [subtle weaknesses](#) into cryptographic protocols, designing [backdoors](#) that double as accidental zero-day bugs, building [rootkits](#) which hide in plain sight, and [handing over](#) user data. In other words all of the behavior that was described by Edward Snowden's documents. Like a jilted lover, consumers will be pacified with a clever sales pitch that conceals deeper corporate subterfuge.

Ultimately it's a matter of shared class interest. The private sector almost always cooperates with the intelligence services because **American spies pursue the long-term prerogatives of neoliberal capitalism**; open markets and access to resources the world over. Or perhaps someone has forgotten the taped phone call of Victoria Nuland selecting the next prime minister of Ukraine as the IMF salivates over austerity measures? POTUS caters to his constituents, the corporate ruling class, which transitively convey their wishes to clandestine services like the CIA. Recall Ed Snowden's [open letter to Brazil](#):

"These programs were never about terrorism: they're about economic spying, social control, and diplomatic manipulation. They're about power."

To confront the Deep State Greenwald is essentially advocating that we elicit change by acting like consumers instead of constitutionally endowed citizens. This is a grave mistake because profits can be decoupled from genuine security in a society defined by secrecy, propaganda, and state capture. Large monolithic corporations aren't our saviors. They're the central part of the problem. We shouldn't run to the corporate elite to protect us. We should engage politically to retake and remake our republic.

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