

No mistaking how NSA story reporter feels

June 11 2013, by David Bauder



Glenn Greenwald, right, a reporter for The Guardian newspaper, speaks to media at a hotel in Hong Kong Monday, June 10, 2013. Greenwald spoke about his interview with Edward Snowden, the 29-year-old contractor who allowed himself to be revealed as the source of disclosures about the U.S. government's secret surveillance programs. (AP Photo/Vincent Yu)

The man who claimed to leak state secrets on U.S. government eavesdropping sought to break the story through a columnist for a U.K.-based publication who has made no secret of his distaste for intrusions on privacy.

Edward Snowden brought his information to Glenn Greenwald of The Guardian instead of to the [Washington Post](#), with which he had briefly corresponded. The case illustrates the passion an opinion-driven journalist can bring to a breaking news story; at the same time it raises questions about fairness.

Greenwald, author of three books in which he argues the government has trampled on personal rights in the name of protecting [national security](#), wrote the original stories exposing the extent of the government's data collection. Over the weekend, he identified intelligence contractor Snowden as his source at Snowden's request, and said more stories are coming.

"What we disclosed was of great public interest, of great importance in a democracy, that the U.S. government is building this massive spying apparatus aimed at its own population," Greenwald said Monday on [MSNBC](#)'s "Morning Joe."

Greenwald also told The Associated Press that he's been contacted by "countless people" over the last 24 hours offering to create legal defense funds for Snowden.

The topic is personal for Greenwald, 46. The former constitutional and civil rights lawyer, educated at the New York University Law School, began the "Unclaimed Territory" blog in 2005 and wrote "How Would a Patriot Act?" a year later. The book criticized the Bush administration for its use of executive power.

Greenwald, now based in Brazil, wrote a regular column for Salon for five years until joining The Guardian last year. He said he wanted to reach a more international audience, a desire that coincided with the news organization's effort to expand its reach in the U.S. market.

One program he wrote about collects hundreds of millions of U.S. phone records. The second program takes in audio, email and other electronic activities primarily by non-U.S. nationals who use providers like Microsoft and Apple. Greenwald described the collection of phone records on Monday as "rampant abuse and it needs sunlight. That's why this person came forward and that's why we published our stories.

On "Morning Joe," he snapped that co-host Mika Brzezinski was using "Obama talking points" when she challenged him with a question.

"The wall of secrecy behind which they operate is impenetrable and it is a real menace to democracy," said Greenwald, who won a 2010 Online Journalism Association award for his coverage of Bradley Manning, who is charged with giving classified documents to WikiLeaks.

Snowden, however, had not just gone to Greenwald with his information. Barton Gellman of The Washington Post wrote on Sunday that Snowden had contacted him about the story. He said Snowden had asked that the Post publish within 72 hours the full contents of a presentation he had made about the collection of electronic activity from the Silicon Valley companies.

Gellman said the Post would not make any guarantees and sought the government's views about whether the information would harm national security. The Post eventually agreed to publish a small sample of what Snowden was offering, but Snowden backed away, writing that "I regret that we weren't able to keep this project unilateral," Gellman wrote.

He then contacted Greenwald, the Post said.

Greenwald's clear point of view doesn't necessarily weaken the story, said Jay Rosen, journalism professor at New York University and author of the Press Think blog.

"In many ways it strengthens it," he said. Greenwald has a clear stance on privacy and national security, but they aren't partisan; he's criticized Democratic President Barack Obama and his Republican predecessor, George W. Bush. Journalists who have strong viewpoints is a tradition with a long history in the U.S., Rosen said.

"The fact that sources now may choose (outlets) on the basis of commitment is a fact and journalists whose professional stance is no commitment may find themselves at a disadvantage," he said.

Greenwald's known feelings on the issue "does leave a little opening for critics," said Ellen Shearer, head of the national security journalism initiative at Northwestern University. There's always a risk that such passion can work against a journalist; some people would worry that facts contradictory to a predisposed belief could be overlooked.

To this point, Shearer said there's been little pushback on the facts, with the debate primarily about whether the information should be published.

Intelligence officials are investigating the leak and its impact on its programs. Director of National Intelligence James Clapper called the revelation of the intelligence-gathering programs reckless and said it has done "huge, grave damage."

The Guardian took care not to publish material that may help other countries improve their eavesdropping or could put the lives of covert agents at risk, Greenwald said.

"We've published these things they marked 'top secret' that don't actually harm national security but conceal what they've done from the public," he said.

The story is a coup for the Guardian, a U.K.-based independent [news](#)

[organization](#) that started covering the United States more aggressively when it determined that one-third of its web traffic came from the U.S. Offices in New York and Washington were opened in 2011, and the Guardian now has 57 employees in the U.S.

The Guardian doesn't offer its newspaper for sale in the U.S. But web traffic to its news website in the U.S. market has increased 47 percent over the past year, and is likely to jump further with this month's exposure.

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