

NSA: Snowden does disservice to whistleblowers (Update)

March 20 2014, by Glenn Chapman



Former NSA contractor Edward Snowden appears by remote-controlled robot at a TED conference in Vancouver on March 18, 2014

The deputy head of the NSA spying agency accused fugitive intelligence contractor Edward Snowden on Thursday of displaying "amazing arrogance" in revealing US eavesdropping techniques.

NSA deputy director Richard Ledgett argued that Snowden, hailed as a hero by many for exposing the vast scope of the National Security Agency's online snooping, had done a disservice to whistleblowers.

Ledgett was addressing the TED ideas conference through a hastily arranged videolink after Snowden, in a rare appearance from his Russian hideaway, had appeared in similar fashion two days earlier.

"We didn't realize that he was going to show up, so kudos to you guys for arranging a nice surprise like that," Ledgett said, kicking off a video chat with TED curator Chris Anderson.

More revelations to come

Snowden appeared from his Russian exile Tuesday in the form of a remotely-controlled robot that rolled around the TED stage and promised more sensational revelations.

"Some of the most important reporting to be done is yet to come," he said, his face appearing on a screen borne by the robot.

Snowden, a former NSA contractor who has been charged in the United States with espionage, sparked a debate in Vancouver over whether he is a traitor or a whistleblower.

Ledgett said he wanted to weigh in at TED with the NSA perspective since Snowden had, he claimed, mixed "kernels of truth" with misleading information.

He insisted that Snowden should have run his concerns about excessive surveillance of private citizens up the NSA chain of command or to any of an array of attorneys general or Congressional committees.

"I think that characterizing him as a whistleblower hurts legitimate whistleblowing activities," Ledgett said.

Snowden used the conference organized by educational non-profit organization TED ("Technology Entertainment Design") to call for people worldwide to fight for privacy and Internet freedom.

He argued that if he had gone to the US Congress with his concerns, he would have risked being "buried along with the information."

And he instead urged the press to challenge government and ignite public debate "without putting national security at risk."

'Amazing arrogance'

Ledgett maintained Snowden had indeed put the US and its allies at risk, by tipping terrorists, rogue nations and other "bad guys" to ways intelligence agents are gathering information.

He urged a TED community that includes the founders of Google and Amazon not to trust Snowden's assertions.

Snowden had displayed "amazing arrogance" in thinking that he knows better than the US Constitution how branches of government should check and balance one another, Ledgett argued.

NSA targets have "moved away from our ability to have insight into what they are doing," putting people in the US and elsewhere at risk because "we won't see things coming their way," he warned.

Rivals pounce on scandal

Ledgett said that it appeared that the spying scandal was being played up as a marketing advantage by rivals to US technology firms.

"They are using that to counter the huge edge US companies have in areas like cloud and Internet technologies," Ledgett said.

He was adamant that "citizens of the world" going about day-to-day affairs or business have a right to privacy and were not being scrutinized by US spies.

"We don't sit there and crank out metadata profiles on average people," Ledgett claimed, insisting that the NSA's real and primary concern is preventing terrorism.

"This is not the NSA running off doing its own things," he assured the TED audience. "This is a legitimate activity agreed to by all the branches of the US government."

Ledgett declined to give his opinion of an amnesty deal for Snowden, saying that decision belonged with US prosecutors.

Ledgett received a standing ovation from the TED audience as he signed off, but Snowden had also been warmly received.

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