

008

“What you don’t know won’t hurt you.”

Since October 2001, the United States government adopted the above idiom in its spying programs; as long as Americans, even senior national security officials, did not know that surveillance programs like PRISM were in place, there was little reservation in their implementation. The NSA surveillance program raised government spying to a level never seen before, using supercomputers and data centers that intercept vast amounts of phone and internet information, including those of ordinary Americans. In 2013, leaks by Edward Snowden revealed elements of the greatest global surveillance program ever known. If government had control over media, meaning media that depends on government approval, Americans would still be left in the dark because government would never permit publication of this story. The NSA debacle is a microcosm for why news media must be independent of the government.

In the summer of 2013, the world was abuzz with astonishment over recent revelations on the scale of a global surveillance network. Politicians, legal experts, and ordinary Americans asked the following question: “Why didn’t Snowden go through proper channels of expressing concern over a particular program?” However, Snowden was not guarded by the same whistleblower protections as any other government employee, because his program was a part of a classified intelligence program.¹ He could only report it to National Intelligence Director James Clapper, demonstrating that the people who control policies cannot be the same people who judge policies. Similarly, if news media were controlled by the government, bad government policies would never be revealed. This has been evident countless times since the program’s inception, with each NSA whistleblower since 2002 being denied the attention that each deserved. When Thomas Drake notified the government, in accordance of the Whistleblower Protection Act, about NSA fraud and corruption, his concerns were ignored.²

008

When Russell Tice urged Congress to increase whistleblower protections, he was fired.³ When J. Kirk Wiebe attempted to report NSA activities to the courts, Department of Justice, and the Inspector General's Office, in his words, "all of the efforts we made just produced no change whatsoever."⁴ There is no place in society for the enforcers and the judges to be the same person, as it is for the NSA.

The NSA debacle has shown that when government interests combine with government powers, Americans' perception is vastly distorted. This has been the case for the past decade, and cannot occur in the spread of information for the future. Americans never rejected these programs for over a decade because they did not know they even existed, and without private news media, they still would not know. If the NSA's whistleblower system were to be integrated into media, government would have jurisdiction over all information released to the public, marking the case as to why there must be minimal interference and overlap. Without news media independent of the government, transparency in its practices would be essentially gone, warping media into a government propaganda pulpit.

¹ Z. Byron Wolf, "Fact-checking Obama's claims about Snowden," CNN, 13 August 2013, 12 January 2014, <<http://www.cnn.com/2013/08/12/politics/obama-snowden-whistleblower/>>.

² Thomas Drake, "Snowden saw what I saw: surveillance criminally subverting the constitution," The Guardian, 12 June 2013, 10 January 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/jun/12/snowden-surveillance-subverting-constitution>>.

³ Dan Eggen, "Grand Jury Probes News Leaks at NSA," The Washington Post, 29 July 2006, 11 January 2014, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/28/AR2006072801606.html>>.

⁴ "NSA Whistleblowers William (Bill) Binney and J. Kirk Wiebe," Government Accountability Project, 14 January 2014, <<http://www.whistleblower.org/program-areas/homeland-security-a-human-rights/surveillance/nsa-whistleblowers-bill-binney-a-j-kirk-wiebe.html>>.