



## EDWARD SNOWDEN

In 2013, former intelligence officer Edward Snowden became confined to a life in hiding after revealing that the NSA was seizing the private records of billions of law abiding citizens. Yet, he remains relentless in his efforts to inform the public about the reality of online privacy and surveillance.

Edward Snowden is an American intelligence contractor who in 2013 revealed the existence of secret wide-ranging information-gathering programs conducted by the National Security Agency (NSA).

Snowden was born in North Carolina but at a young age his family moved to central Maryland, a short distance from NSA headquarters at Fort Meade. He dropped out of high school and studied intermittently between 1999 and 2005 at a community college. Snowden completed a GED but did not receive a college degree. In 2004 he enlisted in the army reserve as a Special Forces candidate, but he was discharged four months later. In 2005 he worked as a security guard at the Center for Advanced Study of Language, a University of Maryland research facility affiliated with the NSA. Despite a relative lack of formal education and training, Snowden demonstrated an aptitude with computers, and he was hired by the Central Intelligence Agency in 2006. He was given a top secret clearance and in 2007 was posted to Geneva, where he worked as a network security technician under a diplomatic cover.

Snowden left the CIA for the NSA in 2009; there he worked as a private contractor for the companies Dell and Booz Allen Hamilton. During this time, he began gathering information on a number of NSA activities—most notably, secret surveillance programs that he believed were overly broad in size and scope. In May 2013 Snowden requested a medical leave of absence and flew to Hong Kong, where during the following month he conducted a series of interviews with journalists from the newspaper *The Guardian*. Among the NSA secrets leaked by Snowden was a court order that compelled telecommunications company Verizon to turn over metadata (such as numbers dialed and duration of calls) for millions of its subscribers. Snowden also disclosed the existence of PRISM, a data-mining program that reportedly gave the NSA, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Government



Communications Headquarters—Britain’s NSA equivalent—“direct access” to the servers of such Internet giants as Google, Facebook, Microsoft, and Apple.

On June 9, 2013, days after stories were initially published in *The Guardian* and *The Washington Post* without revealing the identity of their source, Snowden came forward, stating that he felt no need to hide because he had done nothing wrong. In a subsequent interview with the *South China Morning Post*, he claimed that the NSA had been hacking into Chinese computers since 2009 and that he had taken a job with Booz Allen Hamilton expressly to obtain information about secret NSA activities. The U.S. charged Snowden with espionage on June 14, and Justice Department officials, including Attorney General Eric Holder, began negotiating with authorities in Hong Kong in an attempt to initiate extradition procedures. The Hong Kong government declined to act, and Snowden, with the assistance of the media organization WikiLeaks, flew to Moscow, where his exact whereabouts became the source of intense speculation. Russian Pres. Vladimir Putin confirmed that Snowden, whose passport had been revoked by the U.S., remained within the confines of the international transit zone of Moscow’s Sheremetyevo airport.

Putin resolutely stated that Russia would take no part in his extradition to the United States, and Snowden applied for asylum in some 20 countries, including Russia. Putin also made clear that he did not wish for Snowden’s presence to damage relations with the United States, and he said that if Snowden wished to remain in Russia, “he must stop his work aimed at bringing harm to our American partners.” After having spent more than a month in the Sheremetyevo transit zone, Snowden was granted temporary refugee status by Russia, and he left the airport in the company of a WikiLeaks staffer.

Although U.S. Pres. Barack Obama was critical of Snowden’s methods, in August 2013 he announced the creation of an independent panel to examine the U.S. government’s surveillance practices. That panel’s findings, published in December 2013, recommended that the mass collection of telephone records be suspended and advised greater oversight of sensitive programs, such as those targeting friendly foreign leaders. Obama acted on a number of these suggestions and recommended congressional review of others, but the role of the NSA and its data-collection efforts remained a bone of contention between



the intelligence community and privacy advocates. In April 2014 The Guardian U.S. and The Washington Post were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for public service for their roles in reporting on the NSA leaks. Snowden characterized the award as “a vindication” of his efforts to bring the secret surveillance programs to light.

In August 2014, as Snowden’s grant of temporary asylum expired, the Russian government awarded him a three-year residence permit (effective August 1), which would allow him to leave the country for up to three months. He was also granted the opportunity to request an extension of that permit and, after five years of residence, to apply for Russian citizenship should he choose to do so.

Snowden is the subject of two major films - *Citizenfour*, a documentary which won the Academy 2015 Award for Best Documentary Feature and the upcoming film, *Snowden* a biographical political thriller based on the book, *The Snowden Files* by Luke Harding and *Time of the Octopus* by Anatoly Kucherena. *Snowden* is being produced and directed by Academy Award-winner Oliver Stone and will be released in 2016.