



II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Snowden

Finally Revealed

by Peter C. Oleson

Edward Snowden, a former National Security Agency contractor who leaked information about U.S. surveillance programs, swore an oath of allegiance to Russia and has collected his Russian passport, his lawyer told state media on Friday.

— Washington Post, December 2, 2022

If there has been any doubt whether Edward Snowden was a whistleblower or not, his recent acceptance of Russian citizenship should dispel that notion.¹ He is a defector, as was MI-6's Kim Philby, Guy Burgess and Donald McLean, CIA's Edward Lee Howard, NSA's William Martin and Bernon Mitchell, and the US Navy's Glenn Souther.² But none of those others were as damaging as Snowden. And Snowden's damage continues even a decade after his fleeing to Moscow as



1. Natalia Abbakumova and Adela Suliman. "Edward Snowden swears allegiance to Russia and received passport, lawyer says," *Washington Post*, December 2, 2022.

2. "The proper espionage term for Edward Snowden is defector, meaning an employee of an intelligence service who takes up residence in another country whose spies are not friends," writes John R. Schindler, a security consultant and former National Security Agency intelligence analyst and counterintelligence officer. "IS HE A RUSSIAN SPY? Snowden Speaks... in German," *Bild*, Nov. 6, 2016, <https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/edward-snowden/speaks-in-german-46236466.bild.html>.

evidenced by the multiple and continuing US damage assessments that have been conducted since. In 2018 Bill Evanina, who directed the National Counterintelligence and Security Center, said at a conference: "This past year, we had more international, Snowden-related documents and breaches than ever..."³ General Michael Hayden was prescient when he stated in 2015 that "Snowden's effect will be long lasting."⁴ Richard Ledgett, who headed NSA's investigation of Snowden's leaks and was later the agency's deputy director, has stated that he is convinced Russia and China, and probably others, have the massive amount of files that Snowden stole.⁵

Snowden has been in Russia for a decade. He continues to claim to be a whistleblower to his five million Twitter followers⁶ and others and that he has not shared his classified materials with Russia. That has been contradicted by knowledgeable Russian officials.⁷

"Of course, Snowden is collaborating with Russian intelligence," Oleg Kalugin, the former head of foreign counterintelligence for the KGB's First

Chief Directorate, who now lives in the United States, has stated. "Kalugin made clear that Snowden's new life revolves around the Federal Security Service, Putin's powerful FSB. 'The FSB are now his hosts, and they are taking care of him...' 'Whatever he had access to in his former days at NSA, I believe he shared all of it with the Russians, and

they are very grateful.'" Schindler writes "To anybody familiar with how Russia works, there can be no doubt

3. Deb Riechmann. "Costs of Snowden leak still mounting 5 years later," *AP*, June 23, 2018. <https://apnews.com/article/hi-state-wire-national-security-europe-russia-government-surveillance-797f390ee28b4bfbb0e1b13cfe0593>.

4. Michael Coleman, "Ex-CIA, NSA Chief Defends U.S. Intelligence Gathering," *The Washington Diplomat*, Aug. 28, 2015.

5. Peter C. Oleson. "Reassessing Edward Snowden: Whistleblower, Traitor, of Spy?," *The Intelligence Journal of US Intelligence Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Winter/Spring 2021, pp 31-5.

6. Andy Keiser & Michael Lumpkin, "Snowden Shows His True Stripes," National Security Institute, 3/30/22, <https://thescif.org/snowden-shows-his-true-stripes-6167e2c70a80>.

7. Oleson, p. 33.

that Snowden has been an agent of the Kremlin at least beginning with his arrival in Moscow three years ago. Whether he was recruited by the Russian intelligence before that is likely... it would be highly abnormal for the FSB to grant sanctuary to an American defector they have never met—yet it remains an open question, and a very important one.”⁸

One of the more interesting recent comments about Snowden comes from Frank Snepp, a disillusioned CIA officer and critic, who was prosecuted for publishing without permission his Vietnam-related book, *Decent Interval*. He excoriates Snowden “who stole boatloads of US secrets, many unrelated to his stated concern about the privacy of US citizens—and then leaked them...” and labels Snowden as a disinformation agent for Moscow. “Whatever U.S. secrets he had in his knapsack to use in bartering for Putin’s favor are likely past their sell-by date or already spent coinage. Now Snowden’s only negotiable currency is his ability to help service Putin’s needs in his current [Ukraine] crisis.” “Snowden is on his way to becoming a Boss Troll for Putin.” Snepp concludes: “He claims his only concern is for privacy...” “But many of his leaks, like those exposing National Security Agency operations against Chinese targets, and those involving critics and allies in Europe and Latin America, have nothing to do with 4th Amendment protections for American citizens and everything to do with ingratiating himself with potential benefactors, from Beijing to Moscow.” “Had he read through his stolen documents, moreover, he would have realized that Russia and China are as aggressive as anyone on the planet in attacking our digital firewalls. If he were to cripple the NSA, which seems to be his real purpose, he would simply be sabotaging our defenses against governments that abhor our constitutional values, including privacy rights.”⁹

Even Barton Gellman, the sympathetic *Washington Post* reporter who interviewed Snowden in Russia and wrote a book about him does not portray him favorably. “Snowden was self-absorbed and often a scofflaw. He... ‘valued his own judgment over the rules, a tendency he exhibited in all of his employments.’ He ‘repeatedly found his way around conventional barriers.’ ‘He had strong libertarian tendencies and disliked security rules. He exaggerated his experiences.’”¹⁰

8. Schindler, “IS HE A RUSSIAN SPY?”, *Bild*. Schindler poses an interesting question: “Why did he choose to repeatedly visit the Russian consulate in Hong Kong, even celebrating his 30th birthday there?”

9. Frank Snepp, “Ed Snowden’s Act Two: The slippery morality of whistleblowing,” *SpyTalk*, 12/13/22, <https://www.spytalk.co/p/ed-snowdens-act-two>, and “Ed Snowden’s Act Two – Part Two,” 12/13/22, <https://www.spytalk.co/p/ed-snowdens-act-two-part-two>.

10. Book Review by Peter C. Oleson of Barton Gellman’s *Dark Mirror*:

Despite his repeated claims, Snowden is no whistleblower.¹¹ Journalist Fred Kaplan has noted “[t]he fact is many of Snowden’s documents bore no resemblance to whistleblowing. Rather, he said, they represented “an attempt to blow U.S. intelligence operations.”¹²

By taking Russian citizenship Snowden has sworn allegiance to an adversary of the United States. “Western security experts have suspected that Snowden’s tweets, at least on intelligence matters, are tightly vetted by the FSB,”¹³ which is Putin’s major security and disinformation agent. He has become a tool of Russian information operations and disinformation.

Defectors to Russia have not always been treated well. Philby, Burgess, and others complained about their situations after defecting.¹⁴ Some have died under unexplained conditions.¹⁵ Once his value to the Kremlin wanes, Snowden faces an uncertain future in the Russia he cannot leave.¹⁶

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Edward Snowden and the American Surveillance State in The Intelligencer, Vol. 25, No. 1, Fall 2020, pp 115-7.

11. “Whistleblowing is ‘the act of reporting waste, fraud, abuse and corruption in a lawful manner to those who can correct the wrongdoing.’” Congressional Research Service, R45345, Oct. 18, 2018.

12. *Secrecy News*, Issue No. 78, September 19, 2016.

13. Schindler, “IS HE A RUSSIAN SPY?”, *Bild*.

14. For example, see Andrew Lowrie’s *Stalin’s Englishman: The Lives of Guy Burgess*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2015.

15. Of the defectors mentioned, Philby, after ten years of virtual imprisonment as the KGB feared he might defect to the UK, was feted by the USSR, given awards, and died of heart failure at the age of 76 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kim_Philby). Guy Burgess died at age 52 in August 1963, twelve years after defecting, of arteriosclerosis and acute liver failure from alcoholism (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guy_Burgess). Donald McLean died at age 69 in Moscow after a serious bout of pneumonia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_McLean_\(spy\)#Death](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_McLean_(spy)#Death)). Edward Lee Howard died at 50 reportedly of a broken neck from a fall (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_Lee_Howard). William Martin defected in 1960. “He later told a Russian newspaper that his defection had been ‘foolhardy’. He also expressed disappointment that the Russians did not trust him with important work. He occasionally sought the help of American visitors in arranging for repatriation...” He “died of cancer in Mexico on January 17, 1987,” at age 56, having been stripped of American citizenship and refused any visa (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_and_Mitchell_defection#Later_years, also James Bamford, *The Puzzle Palace: Inside the National Security Agency, America’s Most Secret Security Organization*, Penguin Books, 1982, pp. 180, 196). Bernon Mitchell, regretted his decision to defect, became an alcoholic, and died in 2001 of a heart attack at the age of 72 (Krishnadev Calamur, “For American Defectors To Russia, An Unhappy History,” *Parallels*, National Public Radio, July 25, 2013). Glenn Souther committed suicide three years after defecting, age 32 (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glenn_Michael_Souther).

16. Snowden has been indicted on espionage charges.