# Snowden: Big revelations to come, reporting them is not a crime

## Former leaker encourages companies to enable Web encryption.

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Edward Snowden made a surprise appearance on the TED stage in Vancouver today—using a [Beam telepresence robot](http://arstechnica.com/information-technology/2013/12/robots-and-telepresence-bandwidth-heavy-tools-invade-the-business-world/) from "somewhere in Russia."

Snowden, in his second remote talk in eight days after [an appearance at SXSW Interactive in Texas](http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2014-03/10/edward-snowden-sxsw), urged online businesses to encrypt their websites immediately. "The biggest thing that an Internet company in America can do today, right now, without consulting lawyers, to protect users of the Internet around the world, is to enable Web encryption on every page you visit," he said. "If you look at a copy of 1984 on Amazon, the NSA can see a record of that, the Russians, the French can—the world's library is unencrypted. This is something we need to change, not just for Amazon—all companies need to move to an encrypted browsing habit by default."

Snowden said the leaks from his document cache would continue. "There are absolutely more revelations to come," he said. "Some of the most important [publishing] to be done is yet to come."

He argued against personalizing his own role in leaking the documents to prompt debate. "Who I am really doesn't matter at all. If I'm the worst person in the world, you can hate me and move on. What really matters is the kind of Internet we want, the kind of relationship with society... I wouldn't use words like hero or traitor. I'm an American and a citizen."

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He said he struggled to find a way to leak the intelligence documents in as responsible a way as he could. "We did a lot of good things in the intelligence community. But there are also things that go too far... decisions made in secret without the public's awareness, the public's consent... When I really came to struggle with these issues, I thought to myself, how can I do these things in the most responsible way?" That was through responsible media. "The first amendment of the US constitution guarantees us a free press—to challenge the government but also to work together with the government, without putting our national security at risk. By working with journalists, by putting all of my information to the American people, we've had a robust debate with a deep investment by the US government, which is resulting in benefits for everyone." There has been no evidence "of even a single incident" whereby the leaks have caused harm.

He said the NSA's PRISM program allowed the US government to "deputize corporate America to do its dirty work for the NSA." "Much of the debate in the US [about PRISM] is it's just [about collecting] metadata. PRISM is about content. Even though some of these companies, Yahoo's one, challenged them in court, they all lost—they weren't tried by an open court but a secret court. Fifteen federal judges have reviewed these programs and found them to be lawful, but what they don't tell you is these are secret judges in secret courts of law." These courts had received 34,000 requests to access information and turned down just 11, he said. "These aren't the people we want deciding what the role of corporate America should be."

The NSA "intentionally misleads corporate partners," he said. One program, [Bull Run](http://www.theguardian.com/world/interactive/2013/sep/05/nsa-project-bullrun-classification-guide), targeted America's own superstructure in dangerous ways, he said, after being dishonest to Internet companies. "They say, 'hey, we need to work with you to secure security systems.' In reality, they're giving bad advice to these companies. They're building in back doors. This is really dangerous—if we lose the trust of something like SSL [encryption], which was specifically targeted, we won't be able to access banks, commerce, without worrying about people monitoring those communications."

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Another NSA program, [Boundless Informant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boundless_Informant), was hidden from Congress, he said. "What Boundless Informant tells us is more communications are being intercepted in America by Americans than in Russia by Russians."

"The NSA has violated their own rules thousands of times in a single year—in one event they intercepted all the calls in Washington DC by accident." Not only were there 2,776 abuses in 2011-12, he said, but the chairman of the US Senate Intelligence Committee had no idea that the rules were being broken thousands of times every year.

TED's curator, Chris Anderson, put to Snowden the argument that Internet users who had done nothing wrong should be unconcerned by the scale of the NSA's role. Snowden replied: "You're giving up your rights. Your rights matter because you never know when you'll need them. People should be able to pick up the phone and call their family, should be able to send a text message to their loved one, buy a book online, without worrying how this could look to a government possibly years in the future. We have a right to privacy. Trusting anybody, any government authority with the entirety of human communications, in secret, without oversight, is simply too great a temptation to be ignored."

He said securing our basic freedoms is not a partisan issue. "People who have enjoyed a free and open Internet, it's up to us to preserve that liberty for the next generations."

Anderson quoted Dick Cheney's condemnation of Snowden for committing "one of the worst acts of betrayal in US history." Snowden replied: "Dick Cheney is really something else... These people have a narrow view of national security. The public interest is not always the same as the national interest. The Internet is not our enemy, our economy is not our enemy."

Snowden said he would "absolutely" welcome the chance to return to the US. But he added: "I'm not going to stop my work in the public interest just to benefit myself." He did not respond directly to a question about how personally he was coping with the fear for his personal safety. "I go to sleep every morning thinking about what I can do for the American people," he replied. "I don't want to harm my government; I want to help my government. The fact that they're willing to completely ignore due process, to declare guilt without ever seeing a trial, these are things we need to work together as a society [to stop]."

He said his work exposed "one of the dangerous legacies we've seen in the post 9/11 era." "They're making the Internet fundamentally less safe for Americans. Is it really terrorism we're stopping? Do these programs have any value at all? I say no. Three branches of the American government say no.

"The bottom line is terrorism has always been a cover for action—it provokes an emotional response. The NSA asked for these authorities back in the 1990s. But Congress and the American people said no, said it's not worth the risk to our economy. But in the post 9/11 era, they used secrecy and the justification of terrorism to start these programs in secret."

Tim Berners-Lee, called on stage by Anderson, said Snowden was a "hero." Snowden in turn supported Berners-Lee's call for an Internet ["Magna Carta](http://www.theguardian.com/technology/2014/mar/12/online-magna-carta-berners-lee-web)." "I grew up in the Internet. I believe a Magna Carta for the Internet is exactly what we need. We need to encode our values in the structure of the Internet. I invite everyone in the audience to join and participate.

"By cooperating, by engaging not just the technical parts of society but the users, to champion that, we'll get not just the Internet we've had, but a better Internet. Something we can use to build a future that will be better than anything we can imagine.

"There's an argument to be made that the powers of big brother have increased enormously. There is still hope, because the power of individuals has also increased by technology. I am living proof that an individual can go head to head against the most powerful intelligence agencies in the world—and win. Journalism is not a crime. Communication is not a crime. And we should not be monitored for our everyday activities."

Anderson ended the interview by asking: "If the NSA is watching, and I know that you are, beam someone in. There's more than one position."