

Whistle Blowing: One Size Doesn't Fit All.
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Snooping and its variations (government, industrial, commercial) is now a major issue fracturing the already fractured American psyche. This is the new great divide, one that is not clearly black or white, but is complicated by many shades of gray.

Terrorism. The first divide is over the majority of us who believe that we are in a global war with the latest of totalitarian enemies, Islamism. A minority believe that this is not a war, but rather criminals best handled by policing, not by national defense.

Since a national government's first duty is to provide security, if we have an other terror attack, government will be taking the blame for not protecting us. Most of us are on the side of those who see their duty this way, and we will give up some personal privacy for this protection. But there are others who believe that their own privacy trumps security. This is a principled position, but one I do not understand.

Whistle-Blowing. There are many cases where decent employees discover actions at their workplace that were egregious: good cops who try to report on abusive or corruption practices; an employee who finds military burials being done with carelessness and error; inadequate care in VA hospitals; a worker in a pharmaceutical company trying to report dangerous practices; a soldier observing brutality in a military prison. Across all work places such problems do come to light, and it is most often because someone with conscience decides to pursue it.

There is no doubt that bucking the status quo can be dangerous to the whistleblower. For this reason, the new law protecting legitimate whistle blowers who went through every possible channel to get the issue resolved, only to be fired when word got out, is welcome. Such people are heroes, not villains or snitches.

Hacking and Leaking. Governments and industries have always spied on the competition. With the advent of the Internet, however, the new career of hacking has been born, a profession capable of violating almost every security a system has. What is new is not only breaking in to steal secrets, but exposing all these secrets to the world. To do this, the hackers depend upon the complicity of the press to publish such data. The press considers itself sacrosanct, the preserver of freedom of expression, however, since when is dealing in stolen property a public service?

Purposes. Genuine whistle-blowers are motivated to correct a single issue, and there ought to be an ombudsman outside the structure of the institution to hear them and protect them from reprisal.

How can we conflate whistle-blowers with hackers, or those who deliberately download and expose classified material to the world? The motivation of the hackers, such as Wikileaks, is to destroy governance. They claim that they are defenders of openness, and that governments should have no secrets, yet they themselves (such as Julian Assange and Edward Snowden) are paranoid about their own privacy. Governments cannot possibly operate without confidentiality or secrets, which they well know. The purpose of this hacking and publishing is the ultimate purpose of anarchy, to destroy government.

Dana Milbank, Washington Post, is a generally careful journalist, yet has managed to conflate whistle-blowing with leaking. He describes genuine whistle-blowers and complains that they were fired or otherwise punished for their good citizenship. These are the very people now protected by the whistle-blower protection law. But what about Snowden's flight from prosecution? He does note that this issue has been made murkier because of his dalliances with China and now Russia. Milbank does not address the even murkier motives of the Guardian newspaper for publishing this data.

The British government is demanding that the Guardian hand over the stolen goods for destruction. They claim national security warrants this, which it probably does. However, I like the stolen property angle even more. These thieves (for that is what they are) are not stealing a loaf of bread to feed their widowed sisters. They are stealing the ability of governments to function.

673 words

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