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The Snowden Affair: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy of an Idealist.

قضية سنودن: نبوءة مثالية مُحَقَّقة ذاتيا

Dr. Hichem Souhali

Batna 2 University/ URNOP, Algiers 2 University (Algeria).

h.souhali@univ-batna2.dz

Abstract

This paper is a historical and semantic approach of the Snowden Affair. The post 9/11 context led the USA to reorganize its intelligence agencies (CIA and NSA) and test their new doctrine: massive electronic surveillance. The Patriot Act (2001) was the instrument of this change and urged the rise of a cyber counter-culture that purposed the organization of a digital resistance. Anonymous, WikiLeaks, and Snowden constituted the most notorious acts of rebellion. Their disparate actions have unveiled the acts of the various American Administrations and the extent of surveillance. Edward Snowden has leaked a considerable number of top secret files and became, thus, the most charismatic figure of the libertarians. Snowden has always claimed that his leaks were restricted to excessive uses of surveillance, and that his will was not to endanger the stability of the American Nation. His autobiography: "Permanent Record" constitutes a statement about idealism and proved to be a "Self-Fulfilling Prophecy", as it has enacted a change in mentalities vis-à-vis the excesses of digital surveillance.

Keywords:

Edward Snowden; Self-fulfilling Prophecy; Patriot Act; Idealism; Leaks.

الملخص:

تتناول هذه المقالة قضية سنودن من منظور تاريخي ودلالي. لقد أدى سياق ما بعد 11 سبتمبر بالولايات المتحدة الأمريكية إلى إعادة تنظيم وكالاتها الاستخباراتية (وكالة الاستخبارات المركزية ووكالة الأمن القومي) واختبار فلسفتها الجديدة المبنية على مراقبة إلكترونية على نطاق واسع. وقد كان قانون باتريوت (2001) هو أداة هذا التغيير والذي أدى إلى ظهور ثقافة مكافحة إلكترونية تهدف إلى تنظيم مقاومة رقمية. تعد حالتي ويكيليكس وسنودن أكثر أعمال التمرد شهرة، إذ أماطت نشاطاتهم المستقلة اللثام عن أفعال الإدارات الأمريكية المختلفة وعن حجم المراقبة الإلكترونية. وقد سرب إدوارد سنودن عددًا كبيرًا من الملفات السرية للغاية وأصبح بذلك الشخصية الأكثر جاذبية في صفوف التحريريين، لكنه لطالما ادعى أن تسريباته مقتصرة على الإفراط في استخدام المراقبة وأنه لم تكن له غاية في تعريض استقرار الأمة الأمريكية للخطر. يعتبر كتاب سيرته الذاتية "السجل الدائم" بيانًا عن المثالية وقد أثبت أنه "نبوءة محققة لذاتها" لما أحدثه من تغيير في الذهنات إزاء تجاوزات المراقبة الرقمية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إدوارد سنودن، النبوءة المحققة لذاتها، قانون باتريوت، المثالية، التسريبات.

h.souhali@univ-batna2.dz

INTRODUCTION

Edward Snowden (1983-) is an American whistleblower who unleashed one of the most memorable espionage scandals of the 2000s: the revelations of an institutionalized massive surveillance of US and Non US citizens. The Snowden case made the headlines of the American media and worldwide press. In fact, the decade was marked by two interlinked phenomena that would define the USA's preoccupations, for the 21st Century: the geopolitical incidences of WTC attacks (9/11) and the exponential development of the worldwide web – including

its diversification and ramifications, especially regarding the delicate issue of personal privacy and data protection.

The Patriot Act, adopted in the aftermath of the 9/11 Attacks, has imposed a considerable set of restriction on US and non US citizens' civil liberties. The Governmental Agencies (CIA, NSA, and FBI), the Department of Justice, and the Pentagon acted with more or less cooperation to make significant retaliations to the terrorist attacks. The historical teachings of the 9/11 attacks were multiple. On the one hand, the attacks demonstrated the United States' vulnerability vis-à-vis international terrorism and its incapacity to predict large-scale attacks. On the other hand, the mass surveillance became an option offered by new information and communication technologies and had to be legitimized, enforced, and scheduled on the whole world population.

2. Historical context, The Patriot Act 2001

The George W. Bush Administration needed a legislative framework to operate a shift towards the entire-security-state-apparatus. Supported by a large Republican majority, Senator Sensenbrenner, F. James, Jr. introduced the Patriot Act^{1 2} on 10/23/2001. Three days later, it was adopted as a public law³. In July 2005, the Senate approved the prolongation of the Patriot Act, despite the growing protests of the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU):

Muslim Americans aren't the only group targeted by American spies. Marginalized groups today come from all across the political spectrum – gun rights advocates and Occupy Wall Street adherents. In 2010, the ACLU did a state- by-state survey and identified 111 incidents of domestic political surveillance in 33 states and the District of Columbia. The report

concludes, “Americans have been put under surveillance or harassed by the police just for deciding to organize, march, protest, espouse unusual viewpoints, and engage in normal, innocuous behaviors such as writing notes or taking photographs in public.”P.145, American Spies. (Granick; 2017)

Surveillance proved to be global and not specifically focusing on Muslims, but further extended randomly to all what would constitute a menace to national security. Surveillance was devised in levels, and through nebulous authorizations, can be extended to outer circles: the ‘suspect’, his family, his friends and the family of his friends, their relatives, and so on. The stretched surveillance obliterated the ethical boundaries regarding the protection of privacy and intimacy.

The opponents wanted the text to be gradually devoid of substance and make obsolete the dispositions that do no longer fit the fluctuating security conditions, while the Congress aimed at making 14 of the 16 section perennial and permanent. After several battles the act was amended several times and renewed on March 2006.

Considered as liberticidal and regressive, the Patriot Act (in its many versions) was harshly criticized by the ACLU, but also by non-American activists.

Under the Patriot Act, National Security Letters (NSLs) are issued by FBI agents, without a judge's approval, to obtain personal information, including phone records, computer records, credit history, and banking history.⁴

One of the most controversial points was the sustenance of phone tapping even when no evident reason justifies that.

3. The cyber counter-culture

The absence of safeguards against instated intrusion in the private spheres, and the predicted response to its intrusive drifts precipitated the birth of a spontaneous counter-culture; cyber-resistance. Subsequently, came to light a whole of anarchist virtual communities named Hacktivists: Anonymous (2003) and WikiLeaks (2006) – being the most notorious. One charismatic figure is Julian Assange, who thorough his perpetual attacks against the US government, became a sort of anti-establishment guru and the spokesman of a whole generation. Chelsea Manning was the pivot of Assange leaking culture. The affair of the American soldier who leaked military top secret information was Assange's testing ground.

The nebulosity of this culture and its confused goals harden the understanding of the evolution of this movement. Their common *modus operandi* is the perpetual DOS (Denial of Service Attacks) and latter – in more systematic way, Whistleblower campaigns : Guantanamo (Cuba, 2002) and Abu Ghraib Prison (Iraq, 2003).

Coleman (2014) explains how an Anonymous lecturer describes the philosophy of the movement: This Anon, who was lecturing anonymously on Skype to my ten enraptured students, immediately offered a series of astute qualifications about this primary ideal: the self-effacement of the individual. (P.46) (See Gabriella Coleman: *Hacker, Hoaxer, Whistleblower, Spy: The Many Faces of Anonymous-Verso*). But if we peek behind the ideal—the notion that Anonymous is everyone's property, an identity commons, so to speak—we see a much more complicated reality. (P. 48). Coleman explains that Anonymous principal value is “the self-effacement of the individual.” (P.47) The cyber counter-culture marked four American administrations: W. Bush (1999-2007) and Obama (2008-2016) who served, each, two terms. The multiplications of illicit deeds

of the NSA fueled the anger of the Americans and their allies. Hence, a sentiment of anti-Americanism prevailed. The US citizens felt the ineluctable loss of their liberties.

4. NSA and post 9/11 doctrine

Since its creation in 1962, under Truman, the NSA was an anti-espionage structure in charge of the interception and the deciphering of wireless communication. McCarthyism and The Cold War, in general, instituted new intelligence protocols predicated on the collection of collective and individual data to thwart the Soviets' agendas. McCarthyism anchored the belief that the enemies of the USA are not systematically overseas, but can be, often, insiders: US residents, infiltrated Communists, or 'traitors':

The fall of the Soviet Block marked the end of the Cold War, and directed the successive US administrations attention to the Middle East (Iraq; Iran), the Balkans, Venezuela, and North Korea, to name a few. These locations constituted in the views of the Pentagon, regions of potential danger - claiming unfriendly stands vis-à-vis the American nation.

In the 1990s, a new configuration redefined the world into a mono-polar system. The fall of communism left a subsequent gap that the USA intended to manage. Concerned about the stability of the World, the CIA was entrusted with the mission of overseeing the 'new' threatening activities. Hence, the NSA role was eclipsed and restricted to casual phone tapping. The USA undertook the pacification of the Balkan, the enforcement and enlargement of the European Union:

The NSA's second era from 1978 and 2001 was one of restriction (...) what followed after 9/11 was a second unleashing: a decade in which the intelligence agencies enjoyed popular supports and a boom in the White House funding (Harding, 2014;291)

The outbreak of the first Gulf War, the Rise of the Taliban Regime in Afghanistan, and the various terrorist attacks against US embassies (Tanzania and Kenya, August, 7th 1998) embodied the rise of a 'new enemy': 'Islamic terrorism'. The attacks were ultimately exported to the American Soil, on September 11th, 2001. The NSA returned on the scene – aided by the Patriot Act. The latter supplied the NSA with an incommensurable power to put under surveillance all potential and non-potential targets. The porosity between the NSA, the CIA, and the Pentagon became evident. The superposition of espionage tasks and the ideological differences between the governmental agencies urged an awkward management of surveillance activities.

Among what is, now, considered as an ambiguous - not say awkward - move is the surveillance of the US' Allies (France, Germany). Then, the intelligence agencies did not discriminate between the enemy and the friendly nations. The outbreak of the WikiLeaks (2006), the Snowden Affair (2013) and the Panama Papers (2016) disclosed the scope of the defiance held by Hacktivists towards the various American Administrations. A floating paranoia was prevailing – everyway - not too far from the one characterizing the era of McCarthyism. Meanwhile, the Obama Administration was endeavoring to solve the consequences of the Arab Spring and its incidences on the MENA region. Thus, the regular leaks did not aid the White House to implement a dexterous management of its relationships with the Arab/Muslim World. Consequently, the US seemed to be isolated simultaneously by its allies and less friendly nations: the security-oriented surveillance provoked a sentiment of insecurity worldwide.

5. The Snowden Scandal

The most symptomatic instance of massive surveillance and undisputedly the most resounding remains the Snowden Affair. On June, 06th 2013, *the Guardian* began to publish a

considerable amount of top secret documents. The information was soon relayed by the *New York Times* and the World's most notorious newspapers. The revelations stretched over 03 years. The papers revealed that NSA used two preferment programs (PRISM and XKeyscore) to spy the UN representatives and European Council, to name a few.

The leaks damaged the diplomatic relationship with Germany and France and relegated the bilateral cooperation until further explanations be provided. The Obama Administration rushed into the adoption of the USA Freedom Act (2015) which set a light control over NSA and tapping activities. Nevertheless, the appeasement moves were not up to the American people's expectations. The permanent stress nurtured by the GAFA and their massive data collection, was not likely to diminish the concerns of the populations. In this particular context, the Snowden Affair resounded as an epiphany: a call to the world and a reminder of the perversity of the unethical use of internet data for the filing of millions of lambda individuals.

The supporters and the antagonists of Snowden diverge on his intentions and point to a series of ulterior motives. Nevertheless, the majority agrees on Snowden's sense of idealism and a disarming naivety. The various historical accounts of the Snowden Affair have established factual truths that often have dissociated acts from intents. The next sections of this paper attempt to understand Snowden's motivations, through his own accounts.

6. *Permanent Record*: Snowden by Snowden

This autobiography is the author's rendition of the happenings of his epic journey. Divided in 3 parts, it sustains the protagonist view of the leaks and provides a subjective. Part one establishes his family anchorage and their unquestionable patriotism. Snowden explains that his idealism stemmed from family values

of commitment and will to serve. The author refers to his talent revelation and his early career objectives.

In the second part, Snowden accounts his enrollment in the CIA and, later, his appointment in the NSA. Snowden noticed weak signals about espionage practices. He enrolled in Dell and then returned to the NSA. He describes his emotional and physical decay. His paranoia grew bigger and had a sneaking suspicion about the outcome of cloud computing.

In the last part, Snowden admits that his settling in Hawaii (to diminish the pressure) did not work. Indeed, he was even more tormented and he created 'Heartbeat', a data-base program aiming at tracing the surveillance activities. 'Heartbeat' intercepted all secret defense documents that will be leaked later. Snowden evokes the tremendous doubts he had before his final decision to leak the documents. The first disclosures were posted by *The Guardian*. The information was relayed by *The New York Times*. The effect was astounding. Immediately, a wave of indignation rose worldwide and Snowden became a public enemy. After a flight to Tokyo and Honk Kong, he settled in hotel temporarily. There, he was interviewed by Glenn Greenwald (*The Guardian*) and Laura Poitras (Filmmaker of the 2014 documentary *Citizenfour*). He vainly attempted to organize an escapade to Ecuador, with Sarah Harrison (of WikiLeaks) and found refuge in Russia. During his retention, he addressed asylum requests to 27 countries, all met with refusals. Snowden did not accept the Russian offer to collaborate with the national secret services, yet he was granted a further extension of asylum.

Factually, Snowden was aided by Julian Assange who did not want to miss the chance to help the American whistleblower. Assange felt guilty for failing to save Chelsea Manning. Thus, with the assistance of Sarah Harrison, they drew up surreal plans to scaffold his spectacular evasion: fake plane tickets, double booking, simulated meetings...etc.

7. The Snowden Rhetoric: A Tone Clarification

Edward Snowden has probably understood that his version of events would constitute a better ‘permanent record’ of his epic journey to disclosing the ‘truth’. His personal rendition of the affair would, also, constitute a testimony about his path that could not altered by other biographies. Snowden possesses undeniable photogenic qualities: good looking, articulate, composed, and far away from the stereotypical figure that people associate to geeks.

In the preface (P.5) he makes a statement about his intents and reveals a certain assertiveness in the explanation of his deeds:

My name is Edward Joseph Snowden. I used to work for the government, but now I work for the public. It took me nearly three decades to recognize that there was a distinction, and when I did, it got me into a bit of trouble at the office. As a result, I now spend my time trying to protect the public from the person I used to be—a spy for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and National Security Agency (NSA), just another young technologist out to build what I was sure would be a better world. Preface, (P.5).

Snowden sets the tone in the opening of his book. He makes a statement about the coming of age experience of a naïve sophomore engineer who awakens to the reality of his job: being a spy and contributing against his ideals to the creation of a system of espionage. In chapter 11 (*The System*), Snowden insists on his non politicized beliefs, until the age of 21:

I'm going to press Pause here, for a moment, to explain something about my politics at age twenty-two: I didn't have any. Instead, like most young people, I had solid convictions that I refused to accept weren't truly mine but rather a contradictory cluster of inherited principles. My mind was a mash-up of the values I was raised with and the ideals I encountered online. It took me until my late twenties to finally understand that so much of what I believed, or of what I thought I believed, was just youthful imprinting. (P.82)

His entrance in the work market coincided with the rise of a political consciousness - nurtured by family values and utter common sense. Snowden's *Permanent Record* is the unapologetic auto-portrait of an idealist: zealous and messianic. Though devoid of religious bigotry, Snowden sustains his purpose; idealism. In his narrative, the concept of idealism appears 11 times in Snowden's memoirs:

On his Intent "Disclosing is not against Government's "own stated **ideals**"P. 09

Parental Consent for Canada "Crofton was **ideal**". P.30

His Statement of Purpose "My mind was a mash-up of the values I was raised with and the **ideals** I encountered online". P.82

On Internet Premises "In the early 2000s the Internet was still just barely out of its formative period, and, to my mind at least, it offered a more authentic and complete incarnation of **American ideals** than even America itself. A place where everyone was equal?"P. 83

On anti Corruption “Even the most cunning and charismatic CO will, over the course of their career, come across at least a few **zealous idealists** whose loyalties they can’t purchase with envelopes stuffed with cash”. P.118

Long Statement on the state “ Authoritarian states are typically not governments of laws, but governments of leaders, who demand loyalty from their subjects and are hostile to dissent. Liberal-democratic states, by contrast, make no or few such demands, but depend almost solely on each citizen voluntarily assuming the responsibility of protecting the freedoms of everyone else around them, regardless of their race, ethnicity, creed, ability, sexuality, or gender. Any collective guarantee, predicated not on blood but on assent, will wind up favoring egalitarianism—and though democracy has often fallen far short of **its ideal**, I still believe it to be the one form of governance that most fully enables people of different backgrounds to live together, equal before the law.” P.161

On Freedom of Press and Leaks “I cast my net not so widely as to imperil the mission, but widely enough to avoid a single point of failure—the New York Times problem. One journalist, one publication, even one country of publication wouldn’t be enough, because the US government had already demonstrated its willingness to stifle such reporting.

Ideally, I’d give each journalist their own set of documents simultaneously, leaving me with none.” P.193

On workers’ profile “But there’s always a danger in letting even the most qualified person rise too far, too fast, before they’ve had enough time to get cynical and **abandon their idealism**.”P. 210

On Lindsay’s Support” As sure as I was of my government’s indignation, I was just as sure of the support of my family, and of Lindsay, who I was certain would understand— perhaps not forgive, but understand—the context of my recent behavior. I took comfort from recalling their love: it helped me cope with the fact that there was nothing left for me to do, no further plans in play. I could only extend the belief I had in my family and

Lindsay into a perhaps **idealistic belief** in my fellow citizens, a hope that once they'd been made aware of the full scope of American mass surveillance they'd mobilize and call for justice." P.225

Admiration for Robert Tibbo (lawyer) "I like Robert—to have been his client is to be his friend for life. He's an **idealist and a crusader**, a tireless champion of lost causes. Even more impressive than his lawyering, however, was his creativity in finding safe houses. While journalists were scouring every five-star hotel in Hong Kong, he took me to one of the poorest neighborhoods of the city and introduced me to some of his other clients, a few of the nearly twelve thousand forgotten refugees in Hong Kong" P. 226

The EU postures" The EU, still under the sway of this **postwar universalist idealism**, now became the first transnational body to put these principles into practice, establishing a new directive that seeks to standardize whistleblower protections across its member states, along with a standardized legal framework for privacy protection" P. 252

Table 1: Idealism Statements

Snowden perpetuates the long transcendental tradition of self-empowerment and heroic figures. His autobiography calls upon the classic American Mythology and its pioneering spirit. The word ideal – in several forms - and its various utilizations indicate a visceral attachment to his verbalized ideals. For him, idealism is associated with individuals and state institutions. It is extended to friends, family, and his wife.

1. A Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Robert K. Merton's *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy Theory* (1948) is a sociological approach to beliefs and actions that explains how individual decisions affect the various social and institutional circles through a chain reaction. Snowden's idealism rejected fear and social determinism:

These changes, and others of the same kind do not occur automatically. The self-fulfilling prophecy, whereby fears are translated into reality, operates only in the absence of deliberate institutional controls. And it is only with the rejection of social fatalism implied in the notion of unchangeable human nature that the tragic circle of fear, social disaster, and reinforced fear can be broken. (P.210)

With Merton's words, one can explain the disillusionment of the initiators of the first act of change and the chain reaction that followed. First labeled as an anti-patriotic spy and traitor, the appraisal of Snowden's story turned into a more positive perception of his story: epic, heroic, and relentlessly idealistic. This may partly explain the connections between Snowden's words and their actual happening in reality. Snowden's attempted to change other people's beliefs by verbalizing and concreting his own ideals. (See Figure below)

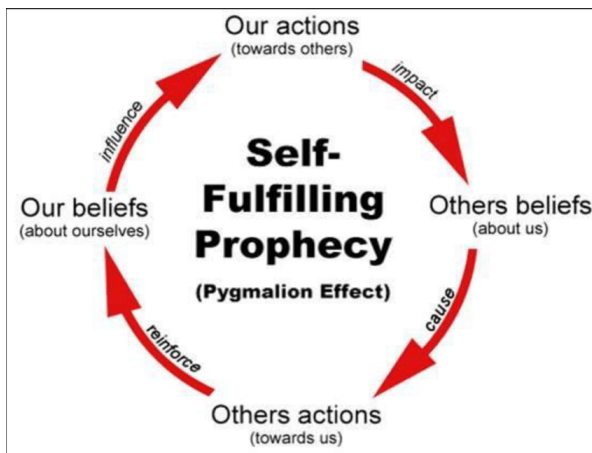


Figure 1: An Illustration of Self-Fulfilling Prophecy⁵

If one refers to the above, Snowden is factually the second or third circle of the Self fulfilling Prophecy. The real initiators of the act are the Hacktivists and Anonymous. Snowden has just endorsed and incarnated the claims of the cyber counter culture.

CONCLUSION

The ‘War against Terror’ as envisioned by the American Administrations (2001-2016) had provoked a series of transformations in management of national security. Aided by the emotional response – subsequent to 9/11, the W. Bush Administration passed the Patriot Act (2001) to fight against external threats. The drifts in the implementation of preventive war and anticipation mechanisms escalated to the extent that massive surveillance of US and Non US citizens. ‘Hacktivism’ appeared as a response to the endangerment of individual liberties: Anonymous, WikiLeaks, and Panama Papers were samples of cyber counter-culture and a social historical response to the NSA and CIA. The most famous instances involve the names of Julian Assange, Chelsea Manning, and Edward Snowden.

The Analysis of Edward Snowden’s autobiography revealed some of the ulterior motives of the Whistleblowers’ philosophy. We assumed that Snowden’s leaking actions stem of his innermost belief in idealism and that his basic intention was to awaken a social and cultural consciousness about the supposed loss of intimacy and the obliteration of individual liberties. Aided by Merton’s theory of *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy*, we noted a chain reaction in beliefs and actions. Snowden appeared not as the imitator of his beliefs/actions, but rather as a resonance to a larger agenda drafted by cyber counter-culture.

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² Source: <https://www.congress.gov/107/plaws/publ56/PLAW-107publ56.pdf> pp. 115 STAT. 278 – 296

³ Source: <https://www.congress.gov/bill/107th-congress/house-bill/3162/text/enr>

⁴ SURVEILLANCE UNDER THE PATRIOT ACT (ACLU.ORG)
<https://www.aclu.org/issues/national-security/privacy-and-surveillance/surveillance-under-patriot-act#tabs--2>

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