

Interview



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Snowden-Interview: Transcript

If one looks to the little public data of your life one discovers that you obviously wanted to join in May 2004 the Special Forces to fight in Iraq, what did motivate you at the time? You know, Special Forces, looking at you in the very moment, means grim fighting and it means probably killing and did you ever get to Iraq?

No I didn't get to Iraq ... one of the interesting things about the Special Forces are that they're not actually intended for direct combat, they're what's referred to as a force multiplier. They're inserted behind enemy lines, it's a squad that has a number of different specialties in it and they teach and enable the local population to resist or to support US forces in a way that allows the local population a chance to help determine their own destiny and I felt that was an inherently noble thing at the time. In hindsight some of the reasons that we went into Iraq were not well founded and I think did a disservice to everyone involved.

What happened to your adventure then? Did you stay long with them or what happened to you?

No I broke my legs when I was in training and was discharged.

So it was a short adventure in other words?

It's a short adventure.

In 2007 the CIA stationed you with a diplomatic cover in Geneva in Switzerland. Why did you join the CIA by the way?

I don't think I can actually answer that one on the record.

OK if it's what you have been doing there forget it but why did you join the CIA?

In many ways I think it's a continuation of trying to do everything I could to prosecute the public good in the most effective way and it's in line with the rest of my government service where I tried to use my technical skills in the most difficult positions I could find in the world and the CIA offered that.

If we go back Special Forces, CIA, NSA, it's not actually in the description of a human rights activist or somebody who becomes a whistleblower after this. What happens to you?

I think it tells a story and that's no matter how deeply an individual is embedded in the government, no matter how faithful to the government they are, no matter how strongly they believe in the causes of their government as I did during the Iraq war, people can learn, people can discover the line between appropriate government behaviour and actual wrongdoing and I think it became clear to me that that line had been crossed.

You worked for the NSA through a private contractor with the name Booze Allen Hamilton, one of the big ones in the business. What is the advantage for the US Government or the CIA to work through a private contractor to outsource a central government function?

The contracting culture of the national security community in the United States is a complex topic. It's driven by a number of interests between primarily limiting the number of direct government employees at the same time as keeping lobbying groups in Congress typically from very well funded businesses such as Booze Allen Hamilton. The problem there is you end up in a situation where government policies are being influenced by private corporations who have interests that are completely divorced from the public good in mind. The result of that is what we saw at Booze Allen Hamilton where you have private individuals who have access to what the government alleges were millions and millions of records that they could walk out the door with at any time with no accountability, no oversight, no auditing, the government didn't even know they were gone.