

Interview



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Snowden-Interview: Transcript

There is this old saying "you do whatever you can do" so the NSA is doing whatever is technically possible.

This is something that the President touched on last year where he said that just because we can do something, and this was in relation to tapping Angela Merkel's phone, just because we can do something doesn't mean that we should, and that's exactly what's happened. The technological capabilities that have been provided because of sort of weak security standards in internet protocols and cellular communications networks have meant that intelligence services can create systems that see everything.

Nothing annoyed the German government more than the fact that the NSA tapped the private phone of the German Chancellor Merkel over the last 10 years obviously, suddenly this invisible surveillance was connected with a known face and was not connected with a kind of watery shady terrorist background: Obama now promised to stop snooping on Merkel which raises the question: did the NSA tape already previous governments including the previous chancellors and when did they do that and how long did they do this for?

This is a particularly difficult question for me to answer because there's information that I very strongly believe is in the public interest. However, as I've said before I prefer for journalists to make those decisions in advance, review the material themselves and decide whether or not the public value of this information outweighs the sort of reputational cost to the officials that ordered the surveillance. What I can say is we know Angela Merkel was monitored by the National Security Agency. The question is how reasonable is it to assume that she is the only German official that was monitored, how reasonable is it to believe that she's the only prominent German face who the National Security Agency was watching. I would suggest it seems unreasonable that if anyone was concerned about the intentions of German leadership that they would only watch Merkel and not her aides, not other prominent officials, not heads of ministries or even local government officials.

How does a young man from Elizabeth City in North Carolina, 30 years old, get in such a position in such a sensitive area?

That's a very difficult question to answer. In general, I would say it highlights the dangers of privatising government functions. I worked previously as an actual staff officer, a government employee for the Central Intelligence Agency but I've also served much more frequently as a contractor in a private capacity. What that means is you have private for profit companies doing inherently governmental work like targeted espionage, surveillance, compromising foreign systems and anyone who has the skills who can convince a private company that they

have the qualifications to do so will be empowered by the government to do that and there's very little oversight, there's very little review.

Have you been one of these classical computer kids sitting red eyed during the nights in the age of 12, 15 and your father was knocking on your door and saying "switch off the light, it's getting late now"? Did you get your computer skills from that side or when did you get your first computer?

Right I definitely have had a ... shall we say a deep informal education in computers and electronic technology. They've always been fascinating and interesting to me. The characterisation of having your parents telling you to go to bed I would say is fair.