Agency (NSA), the U.S. agency charged with gathering foreign electronic intelligence. On June 9, the *Guardian* released a video interview with Edward Snowden, the individual responsible for leaking the information. The thirty-three-year-old Snowden was a former CIA and NSA contractor. After fleeing the United States and being denied asylum in Hong Kong and unsuccessfully seeking asylum in several other countries, Snowden received temporary asylum for three years in Russia.

Little is known about Snowden's background. He reportedly never received a high school diploma and briefly attended a community college. There is little doubt that he had a strong interest and aptitude for computers and maintained an active online presence. In 2004, Snowden, whose father was a veteran of the Coast Guard, joined the military in the aftermath of 9/11 and enlisted in a program that fast-tracked him into the Special Forces.

Snowden's slight build and various physical limitations made him an unlikely candidate for the Special Forces. In the summer of 2005, he was discharged from the Army after allegedly breaking both his legs. Snowden spent the next several months as an IT security specialist at the University of Maryland Center for Advanced Study of Languages, a joint enterprise with the U.S. government.

In 2007–2008, Snowden worked in Geneva, Switzerland, as a contractor for the CIA maintaining network security. He later claimed that he grew disillusioned with the agency, and in 2009, Snowden terminated his relationship with the CIA, perhaps in response to an investigation into his attempt to access classified files.

Snowden next was hired by Dell as a contractor engaged in computer analysis for the NSA. He was sent to Japan, which fulfilled a longtime interest in Japanese culture and language. At some point, Snowden was certified as an "Ethical Hacker" employed by the NSA to counteract efforts to penetrate the agency's computer system. Snowden subsequently was transferred to Hawaii to work at the NSA's regional cryptological center.

A central event in shaping Snowden's attitudes toward U.S. security services was his inadvertent discovery of a report that provided a detailed account of the Bush administration's warrantless wiretapping of both Americans and foreigners following 9/11. His sense of alienation was heightened in March 2013 when James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, denied before a congressional committee that the NSA had been collecting data on U.S. citizens, a claim that Snowden knew to be false.

Snowden next took a job with the technology consulting firm Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH), which like Dell contracted to work with the NSA. Snowden worked as a professional hacker charged with detecting vulnerabilities in U.S. technology that might be exploited by foreign countries. Snowden's responsibilities allowed him access to top-secret Internet programs and provided him with the opportunity to illicitly transfer data onto a thumb drive that he transmitted to journalists whom he trusted at the *Guardian* and *Washington Post.*

The information leaked by Snowden to journalists revealed that since 2006 the NSA had engaged the bulk collection of the domestic and foreign telephone numbers dialed by Americans. This secret "metadata" program called PRISM was based on bulk search warrants issued every three months by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) that directed nine Internet providers to turn records of the phone numbers dialed by every American over to the government. Once an individual was specifically singled out for additional investigation, the NSA followed a "three hops rule," analyzing all phone calls made by the target and all phone calls made by individuals called by the target, as well as all phone calls made by the individuals they called. This might be followed by a search warrant allowing the government to monitor the content of an individual's phone calls and e-mails.

Snowden believed that the government's bulk collection and storage for five years of all the numbers dialed by Americans without any basis to suspect that U.S. citizens or residents were agents of a foreign power or were engaged in criminal activity violated the Fourth Amendment prohibition on unreasonable searches and seizures and violated the privacy of U.S. citizens. Studies concluded that the collection of the numbers dialed by an individual could reveal virtually every aspect of an individual's life. Snowden argued that the U.S. public was entitled to be informed that the phone numbers they dialed were being monitored, and explained that his goal in revealing large amounts of information to selected journalists was to spark a worldwide discussion on privacy and on the state surveillance of individuals across the globe.

A special review committee appointed by President Obama concluded that the "metadata" program had not been proven essential to detecting terrorist plots and the information obtained through the "metadata" program could have been obtained by relying on the traditional search warrant procedure.

The disclosure of PRISM led President Obama to propose reforms in the program.

Congress after an extended debate adopted the USA Freedom Act, which provided that phone providers retain metadata rather than turning the data over to the government. The NSA may obtain access to these records only by obtaining a warrant from the FISC.

The U.S. government has charged Snowden with espionage, and government officials labeled him a coward for fleeing rather than remaining in the United States and assuming responsibility for his actions.

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