

Snowden is a traitor in all but name

By James Jay Carafano

WASHINGTON — Edward Snowden stole hundreds of thousands of American secrets and sprinkled them across the Internet. Should he be considered a traitor?

The Australian government thinks so. Snowden's revelation of highly sensitive intelligence operations "down under" led Australian Federal Attorney-General George Brandis to brand the ex-NSA contractor an "American traitor."

No wonder the Aussies were angry. For years they had cooperated covertly with Indonesian intelligence services. Overt cooperation was out of the question, due to Jakarta and Canberra's longstanding war of words over "Bali, boats, and beef" — the treatment of Aussie tourists, South Asian "boat" people, and cattle exports.

But behind the curtain, the two democracies had worked out a practical, mutually beneficial information-sharing deal that helped them deal with sensitive issues like refugees and human trafficking. Snowden's disclosures have now jeopardized this valuable cooperative effort.

In a strictly legal sense, under U.S. law Snowden might not meet the definition of the word "traitor." But the common understanding of the term would certainly apply.

In disclosing national security secrets, Snowden was following in the footsteps of Julian Assange, the Australian-born founder of WikiLeaks. Both men claim a noble purpose: to use the power of the Internet to expose the corruption and wrong-doing of totalitarian regimes. But in practice, they have told us almost nothing about countries like North Korea, Iran, China, Cuba and Venezuela.

Instead, they've mostly spilled secrets from nations ranked at the top of the Freedom House "Index of Freedom in the World." These are the countries that organize the peacekeeping and

humanitarian missions, combat nuclear proliferation, champion human rights, fight terrorism and human trafficking, and hold free and fair elections.

Regardless of their stated intentions, Snowden's and Assange's actions have undercut the world's champions of freedom and given aid and comfort to the world's totalitarian regimes.

Further, they have betrayed the idea of freedom. The Assange/Snowden doctrine asserts that complete transparency equals freedom. That's not just naïve. It's as pornographic a description of freedom as Auschwitz's "Work Makes You Free" sign.

Respect for individual privacy is an inherent component of freedom. The government of free peoples is an extension of the people, exercising sovereignty on their behalf. Free societies recognize that keeping legitimate secrets is a legitimate function of government.

Democracies operate under the concept of "ordered liberty." They establish rules to protect both the individual and the community as whole — guarding both individual freedom and public safety. No one has the right to discard those rules and substitute rules of his own devising. Flouting ordered liberty doesn't advance freedom. It creates chaos. And chaos enables evil and kills democracies.

Snowden is neither "freedom fighter" nor "whistleblower." His leaks are indiscriminate. The vast majority expose no wrong-doing whatsoever.

What about those cases where Snowden might argue he has revealed practices that might cross the line? His actions are still, at best, irresponsible.

The United States system of ordered liberty offers multiple ways to raise claims of malfeasance or abuse of power without compromising national security. Federal agencies have Inspector Generals. Congress routinely investigates such claims. And, yes, we have "whistleblower" protection laws. The

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notion that Snowden had no option but to leak is indefensible.

Finally, Snowden betrayed the trust he was given by the U.S. government to safeguard the nation's secrets.

Free societies depend on a trustworthy citizenry. If bank tellers, lawyers, doctors, police officials and others in positions of trust were to decide they were, individually, the best arbitrators of what information should or should not be dumped in the public sphere, we wouldn't be living in Assange's paradise. We would be living in North Korea, where no one is trusted ... ever.

Edward Snowden has betrayed freedom. In the end, that's a much greater offense than intentionally acting like an enemy agent.

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