Beat: News

New York Times, the Guardian call for clemency for Edward Snowden

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USPA News - Two of the world`s largest publications came to American whistle-blower Edward Snowden`s defense Thursday, appealing for the U.S. government to grant the troubled NSA leaker clemency for his revelations on the U.S. government`s spying techniques. The New York Times and the Guardian newspapers, in separate editorials, backed the fugitive whose release of top-secret National Security Agency (NSA) documents revealed details about the extent of the U.S. government`s surveillance on phone and internet communications.

"Considering the enormous value of the information he has revealed, and the abuses he has exposed, Mr. Snowden deserves better than a life of permanent exile, fear and flight," the New York Times wrote in its editorial. "He may have committed a crime to do so, but he has done his country a great service." U.S. federal prosecutors have charged Snowden with espionage and felony theft of government property for leaking classified information, which has brought renewed diplomatic headaches for the U.S. government. Britain`s Guardian newspaper also urged Washington to allow Snowden to return to the U.S. "with dignity." "Mr Snowden gave classified information to journalists, even though he knew the likely consequences. That was an act of some moral courage," The Guardian wrote. "We hope that calm heads within the present administration are working on a strategy to allow Mr Snowden to return to the US with dignity, and the president to use his executive powers to treat him humanely and in a manner that would be a shining example about the value of whistleblowers and of free speech itself." The National Security Council declined to comment on the editorials, and U.S. officials have repeatedly insisted they intent to prosecute Snowden. "Our views on the damage caused by the disclosure of highly sensitive, classified information have not changed, and that he has been charged with felonies, and he ought to be returned to the United States and face those charges here in the United States where he will be accorded all due process and protections," a White House spokesman said last month. The American Civil Liberties Union has called Snowden "a great American who deserves full immunity for his patriotic acts," while Human Rights Watch`s executive director Kenneth Roth on Thursday remarked that Snowden exposed "major" misconduct. "Others filing official complaints were ignored/persecuted. He should be pardoned," he said. In his first television interview broadcast on Christmas day, as part of British Channel 4`s "Alternative Christmas Message," Snowden compared the U.S. government`s spying techniques to George Orwell`s book "1984," in which Orwell describes a totalitarian society where everyone is under complete surveillance by authorities. "Recently, we learned that our governments, working in concert, have created a system of worldwide mass surveillance, watching everything we do," Snowden said in the television broadcast. He went on to say that what Orwell had imagined is "nothing compared" to what is available today. "We have sensors in our pockets that track us everywhere we go. Think about what this means for the privacy of the average person," the whistleblower said. "A child born today will grow up with no conception of privacy at all. They`ll never know what it means to have a private moment to themselves - an unrecorded, unanalyzed thought." "The conversation occurring today will determine the amount of trust we can place both in the technology that surrounds us and the government that regulates it," he added. "Together, we can find a better balance, end mass surveillance, and remind the government that if it really wants to know how we feel, asking is always cheaper than spying." Snowden`s message came just days after he declared his own mission accomplished. "For me, in terms of personal satisfaction, the mission`s already accomplished," he told the Washington Post. "I already won. As soon as the journalists were able to work, everything that I had been trying to do was validated. Because, remember, I didn`t want to change society. I wanted to give society a chance to determine if it should change itself." Before being granted political asylum in Russia, Snowden had been stuck inside the transit zone at a Moscow airport for five weeks after fleeing Hong Kong when the U.S. charged him with three felony counts, including violations of the U.S. Espionage Act.

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