

Enemies of the State: Edward Snowden, Anat Kamm

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In the movie, rogue US intelligence operatives try everything they can to kill the whistle-blower on the murder of a US senator. U.S. National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden

U.S. National Security Agency whistleblower Edward Snowden Photo: REUTERS

The 1998 action-thriller movie *Enemy of the State* that tried to scare the public about the scope of US government electronic surveillance and infringement of civilian privacy had no idea how much broader government power in that area actually is than even the movie presented.

In the movie, rogue US intelligence operatives try everything they can to kill the whistle-blower on the murder of a US senator.

Edward Snowden, the self-admitted leaker of all of the recent revelations about the US's mining of telephone and Internet data of its citizens and beyond, will most likely be jailed and not killed, but he can already add his name to a special list of persons who have become an "enemy of the state."

His disclosure that the US collects data from the Verizon telephone giant on every call and all kinds of Internet data from Google and other major Internet service providers has reignited the debate about balancing security and privacy rights that most recently exploded in Israel around the Anat Kamm case.

Kamm copied more than 2,000 documents when she was assistant to the bureau chief of former Central Command head Maj.-Gen. Yair Naveh between 2005 and 2007.

The stolen documents contained top-secret information concerning General Staff orders, personnel numbers in the Central Command, intelligence information, information on IDF doctrine and data pertaining to sensitive military exercises, weaponry and military platforms, including deployment plans to respond to a major West Bank escalation.

Upon receiving the files from Kamm, Haaretz journalist Uri Blau went on to publish several articles, including one accusing the IDF of defying a Supreme Court ruling against killing wanted Palestinian terrorists who could have been captured alive. The story, approved by the military censor, suggested the IDF had unilaterally loosened its rules of engagement and marked terrorists for assassination.

What are the differences and similarities between Snowden and Kamm? Is one more noble or less sinister? Kamm was in her early 20s, a low level desk-worker and typical draftee out of high school

who released an immense volume of files, most of which she did not check for collateral damage from disclosure. She acted ideologically, but in a general way of trying to expose IDF secret actions she thought were illegal and immoral, but not aimed at a specific action or program.

Effectively, Blau really chose what would be made public and what would not.

Kamm initially wanted to escape detection and did not reveal herself until arrested and officially interrogated for the crime.

Snowden, older by an important margin and at age 29 was a seasoned ex-CIA computer operative, disclosed the existence of two specific massive programs, but was very careful about what information and documents he disclosed.

He was ideological, appearing less anti-government than Kamm, in that he appears to believe that the US intelligence community is more “misguided” than “immoral” as Kamm might accuse parts of the Israeli military of being.

Snowden outed himself before being investigated, almost unheard of in similar cases.

Kamm’s revelation was presented by the government as potentially directly endangering soldiers’ lives whereas Snowden’s leak at most endangers the effectiveness of some US electronic-spying tools, however crucial those tools might be.

It would seem that Kamm, while ideological, was in over her head, and almost spontaneously wrecked her life (or at least the several years she is serving in prison), whereas Snowden carefully (he may get extradited, but is currently safe in Hong Kong) and over time meticulously planned his leak.

On the other hand, Kamm and Blau could try to claim the moral high ground, since they accused the IDF of violating orders of the High Court.

Snowden, in contrast, has accused the US of at most violating what he believes is the public’s sense of what their freedoms should be, though the programs are fully authorized and supervised by the US Congress and specialized US courts.

Daniel Ellsberg, leaker of the US Pentagon Papers, has called Snowden’s leak even more significant.

But again Ellsberg, like Kamm, accused a government of lying to the public about the US war in Vietnam or violating the law.

Of course, another major narrative is that all government employed whistleblowers are traitors, no matter their motivations.

This debate is likely to go unresolved now as in the past, but if Snowden is any indication, whistleblowers in the modern age are a phenomenon that is here to stay.