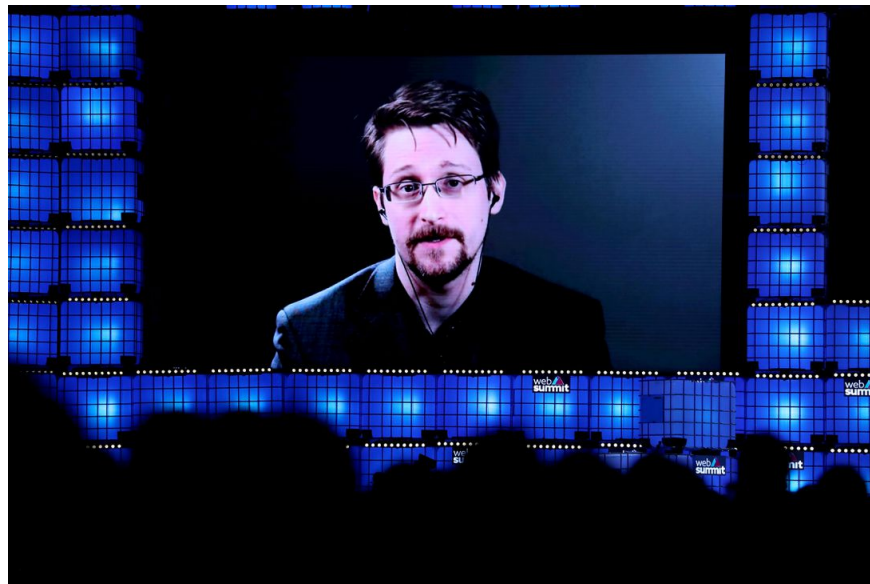


Snowden warns government surveillance amid COVID-19 could be long lasting

Governments could look for reasons to continue tracking people's activity, he says.

Edward Snowden on Monday warned that high-tech surveillance measures governments use to fight the outbreak of COVID-19, the disease caused by the newly identified coronavirus, could have a long-lasting impact. That's according to an interview with the Copenhagen International Documentary Film Festival.



The US government, for instance, is reportedly in talks with tech companies like Facebook and Google to use anonymized location data from phones to help track the spread of COVID-19. While some say the measure could be a helpful tool for health authorities to track the virus, others have expressed concerns about their information being shared with the government.

Snowden, a former National Security Agency contractor who leaked documents about mass surveillance activities, said governments can extend the access they have to people's personal information during a crisis and use it to monitor their actions. During this pandemic, for example, governments might say they're worried about public health and could send an order to every fitness tracker to look at measures like pulse and heart rate, and then demand access to that kind of activity, he said.

After the virus is gone and the data is still available to them, governments can use new causes like terrorist threats to justify continually gathering and analyzing people's data, he said.

"They already know what you're looking at on the internet," Snowden said during the interview. "They already know where your phone is moving. Now they know what your heart rate is, what your pulse is. What happens when they start to intermix these and apply artificial intelligence to it?"

In 2013, Snowden revealed details of NSA surveillance programs to journalists, which led to heightened concerns about privacy in the digital era. He faces charges of espionage and theft of government property in the US, and has been living in Russia since 2013.

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