

National Security: Sample our intellectual buffet. Or make your own meal.

Timothy Garton Ash introduces a sample tour of the content on our site.



National security is one of the grounds most frequently cited by governments to justify restrictions on free speech. It is also one of the most frequently abused. Authoritarian regimes invoke 'national security' to protect from public scrutiny anything they want to keep secret and criminalise speech they think might threaten their power. But even in democracies, such as the US and UK, as the revelations made by Edward Snowden showed, national security has been invoked to justify extraordinary invasions of privacy and curtailments of free speech. This is one of the most pressing areas of concern around freedom of expression. Working out how a reasonable balance can be transparently struck is one of the great challenges of our time.

We want to introduce you to a selection of the content we have on the site on this issue. All printable items can be downloaded as an automated PDF. Alternatively, you can simply display content on the internet, and play streamed video and audio. Obviously, you can pick and choose to suit your own interests, or those of the group you are working with. Note that almost all this content

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is available in a number of our 13 languages – and some of it in all of them. To choose your language, click on the language button at the top of the screen.

Introduction

You might want to start by looking at my [Introduction](#). This spells out many of the issues that have arisen, and explains the thinking behind our principle in more detail.

National security and privacy

Britain's veteran free speech legislator Anthony Lester, and his legal officer Zoe McCallum, discuss [the balance between national security and privacy](#).

Many [governments justify what they do in internet surveillance by reference to a threat of terrorism](#): Nigeria, for example.

In China [critical comments can be treated as threats to the security of the state](#). A Chinese activist found himself in prison after his personal details were passed on to the Chinese government.

Is Germany a special case?

[Germany has been especially sensitive to invasions of personal privacy](#), justified in terms of national security. This is often ascribed to Germans' experience of two totalitarian dictatorships, Nazi and Stasi. FSD team member Sebastian Huempfer challenges that view.

National security and secrecy

It is worth being reminded why [secrecy can sometimes be valuable](#), and indeed essential. An American diplomat points to the example of peace talks.

Whistleblowing

There should obviously be ways in which restrictions and intrusions justified on grounds of national security can be questioned, without jeopardizing the genuine interests of security. [Thomas Drake tried to do the right thing when he worked for the United States National Security Agency](#). This is what happened to him.

A former CIA analyst [Ray McGovern, also gives a nuanced defence of the value of whistleblowing](#).

[So does former British MI5 agent Annie Machon](#).

They argue that proper arrangements for whistleblowing inside these organisations would mean

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that people would not need to leak them to journalists, or dump them on the internet.

Freedom of expression and 'sedition' in India

But in many places these claims are taken much further. In India, for example, [satire is often treated as sedition](#).

The award winning Indian novelist and activist Arundhati Roy talks to us about the way [Indian authorities invoke national security as a trump card](#) to try to shut up people like her.

National security and the freedom to research

And in China, a [researcher finds himself locked up when material he had worked on was reclassified as 'secret'](#).

[In Russia, academic research has been criminalised as espionage](#)

Freedom of information

A vital tool in giving citizens oversight of what their governments are doing is freedom of information. Some governments are all the more reluctant to grant it. The [Zambian government, for example, withdrew a freedom of information bill in 2002 citing concerns about national security](#). Ten years on, Zambians were still waiting for it.

iDebate

If you wanted to try a structured debate in this area, our partners at idebate.org lay out these two: "[This House believes transparency is necessary for security](#)".

And also, "[This House believes a nation's history and mythology is part of its national security](#)".

We hope you find this useful and interesting. Do please give us your feedback, either by posting comments on the site or by emailing editor@freespeechdebate.com.

Enjoy your own debate.

Timothy Garton Ash, on behalf of the Free Speech Debate team.

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