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Press Officers, Michaelmas 2016

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Cambridge, 16 October 2016

Press Release: 16 October 2016 **OLIVER STONE SPEAKS AT THE CAMBRIDGE UNION**

On October 16th, the Cambridge Union was delighted to welcome world-renowned film-maker, three-time Academy Award Winner and five-time Golden Globe winner, Oliver Stone. Mr Stone opened with a discussion about his recent biography, and the enjoyable process of many hours of interviews with the author. However, the conversation quickly jumped onto his new work *Snowden*, which he said was asking the question: “how far are we allowed to criticize the American government?”. He also delivered a critique of how the news cycle in America obscures a great deal of information about the Snowden case “I doubt an ordinary American could tell the difference between Snowden, Manning and Assange...they are ‘one of those guys’” he said.

He joked as well about the reception of his films and work in the United States, recounting a particular humorous interview with Fox News Host Bill O’Reilly who opened an interview with Oliver Stone with “do you think the United States is a noble country?” Mr Stone argued that this is symptomatic of the “madness that pervades American politics”, one that is “absolutist in nature” about America’s greatness. He returned to the Edward Snowden saga, noting that “there is very little literature about the NSA”, and he said it was extraordinary to meet Snowden nine times to gain information “in extraordinary detail”. He went on to describe the “massive databases” the NSA has, that can collect metadata “for up to five years”. Mr Stone was quick to point out that he supports some security measures – “but targeted surveillance, which is the most effective”.

Stone then moved onto a short discussion about 9/11 and how targeted surveillance could have worked. He noted that there were many signals about abnormal behaviour “but no follow up” – the “CIA was warning and warning” but the Bush White House did nothing. Instead, he said that the current method is to “get everything”. He impressed upon the room - “you have to know that the United States is listening”, and that it is “about control”. “You can get information about Assad, you can make regime change happen”, he said. Because of America’s power “UK is not really our ally, but our hostage”, as was the case for many countries. He brought it back to *Snowden*, which he argued was a way to show the world how the security state is working. “It’s a racket” he said, the security state will “always want more money” – “do we have any evidence that massive-eavesdropping works?” Stone asked.

When asked about how ‘tough’ the American government has been on Assange and Snowden, Stone mentioned immediately that “it has gotten very tough to be a journalist” there is “a brick wall now” he said, mentioning how the American government blocks journalists trying to gain insight into the national security state. He emphasized that the film demonstrates this, and that at its core, *Snowden* is about how “a Conservative young man...goes on to question anything”. He emphasized as well that Snowden has “behaved in the public interest”. He said that he tried to bring empathy to whatever role he has put on screen – from Nixon to Bush and now *Snowden*.



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Mr Stone then spoke about his experiences in war – he himself fought in Vietnam. “Everyone should go to war for a few days, to really understand what it is like” he said. “War is the worst thing that can exist, the end of civilization.” But America almost needs war, Stone said “we keep making bigger and better weapons” and then you sell them off he said – “you are militarizing the world”. “The world is getting hotter and hotter”, he emphasized and it has “expanded so much in my lifetime, as devilish as you can get”.

On a lighter note, Stone then spoke about how he gets inspiration “I just sit there, and think” he said. He then asked the audience “where does superhero worship come from” – he argued that “simplistic thinking” which baffles him “because we have built an incredibly complex economy and incredibly complex computers”. This “Manichaeian thinking” reduces big ideas and he said that “I have never seen the world presented so simply in my lifetime” he finished. But, he implored us to share information, vote, get active; “know thyself, the purpose of the world is a Socratic one.” Thus Mr Stone gave us a brilliant window into one of the bright creative minds in the American firmament, and a searing critique of the state of American politics.

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For footage of the event go to <https://www.youtube.com/user/cambridgeunionsoc>
Monday, 17 October 2016