

Big Brother: America's Police State Mentality in the Electronic Age

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"They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety." Benjamin Franklin (1706 - 1790), American inventor, journalist, printer, diplomat, and statesman (1775)

"Americans used to roar like lions for liberty; now we bleat like sheep for security." Norman Vincent Peale (1898 -1993), American Christian preacher and author

"A Party member lives from birth to death under the eye of the Thought Police. Even when he is alone he can never be sure that he is alone. ...At the apex of the pyramid comes Big Brother. Big Brother is infallible and all-powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration." George Orwell (1903-1950) (Eric Arthur Blair), (book: 1984)

"Since information gives power, access to personal files can lead to unreasonable pressures, even blackmail, especially against those with the least resources, people who depend upon public programs, for example. Big Brother isn't a camera. Big Brother is a computer." C.J. Howard, political novel "Cybercash"

In 2049, when the 100th anniversary of the publication of George Orwell political novel "1984" will be celebrated, it will be recalled that the immediate post September 11, 2001 period marked the beginning of a gradual decline in personal liberty and freedom, especially in the United States but also elsewhere, and the emergence of a great information-obsessed Leviathan. Freedom rarely disappears in one fell swoop. Its disappearance is rather the end result of a thousand encroachments.

Pushed to the extreme and without clear democratic oversight, it becomes the mark of a totalitarian state, when authorities feel that they never have enough information on the people. It is because information is power and state bureaucrats and politicians naturally like to be in control; on the one hand, releasing as little information about their own actions through an imposed secrecy, and on the other, accumulating as much information as possible about the citizens.

And today, modern governments have all the tools to transform their country into a creeping police state, more so now than ever before, in this electronic age. They have

access to information technology that previous full-fledged “police state” governments could only have dreamed about.

Nowadays, with super computers and revolutionary new models to gather information and build databases, governments, i.e. bureaucrats and politicians, are in a position as never before to accumulate and correlate tremendous amounts of personal information on their citizens, from public (federal, state and local) as well as from a plethora of private sources. Government intelligence on each and every citizen is thus rendered much easier and, I would add, much more frightening. Indeed, the potential for abuse is enormous.

In 2002, for example, retired Vice Admiral John Poindexter proposed that the U.S. government create a tracking and monitoring system called “Total Information Awareness”, in order for the U.S. government to gather information in a preventive way about individuals from widely varied sources, including tax records, telephone calling records, credit card charges, banking transactions, airline or ship reservations, and various biometric databases, without taking into consideration civil liberties or a citizens’ right to privacy, the U.S. Privacy Act of 1974, or without having to request search warrants and without having to give prior notice to the persons involved. —The pretext was to allow the government to thwart possible terrorist activity, thus creating an unlimited appetite for information.

Well, there are clear signs that this massive data mining system on individuals is now solidly in place and is in full operation and can be expected to grow over time. George Orwell must be turning in his grave.

First, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s network of fusion centers, launched in 2003, has allowed the government to centralize a host of previously disparate information about Americans and foreigners alike, whether related to personal and business records, drivers licenses, local taxes, local infractions, police records, etc., through a host of coordinated information-sharing networks. (N.B.: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was established on November 25, 2002 and is the domestic equivalent of the Department of Defense.)

Secondly, central provisions of the USA Patriot Act, signed into law by President George W. Bush on October 26, 2001, allow the government to operate roving wire taps, search any individual’s business, personal, and even library records upon presentation of a national security letter, and spy on so-called “lone wolf” suspects, i.e., foreign nationals who have no known links to groups designated as terrorist. On this, the current Obama administration, by extending those provisions, is scarcely different than the previous Bush administration.

Thirdly, since passports and tight intelligence screening have been made a requirement for most international travel by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, since January 1, 2008, every individual traveling in and out of the United States has all his or her whereabouts and movements recorded so the government knows at all times his or her address and the places he or she has traveled to and from.

For instance, U.S. Transportation Security Administration’s recent decision to use full-body airport X-ray scanners and full body groping at airports is another example where so-called security procedures are applied blindly and indiscriminately. There is more to come, since it has been announced that such invasive intelligence screening is coming to hotels and shopping malls, as well as to trains, buses and ports, etc.

These are some of the main features of the new government apparatus to gather information on people. There are many others. —Take for instance the requirement, since 2002, that all American high schools must give Pentagon military recruiters the names and contact information of all their juniors and seniors. Failure to comply on their part may result in the loss of government funding.

The logical next step for the U.S. government would be to follow a recent Italy's lead and outlaw outright the use of cash for most transactions, except for small ones, thus providing the government even more minute information about an individual's income, purchases and displacements. Nothing will escape the watching eye of the government in the electronic age. People will be filed, photographed and corralled.

Indeed, the way mass government surveillance systems are growing, by year 2020, chances are good that Americans will be living in a "Brave New World"!

—CYBER BIG BROTHER would know it all and it will be watching you.

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The book "The Code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles", by Dr. Rodrigue Tremblay, prefaced by Dr. Paul Kurtz, has just been released by Prometheus Books.

The French version of the book is also now available. See: www.lecodepouruneethiqueglobale.com/ or on Amazon Canada

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