

Globalization, Civil Rights and the Cyber-Surveillance State

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Globalization has reached its apogee– spying on European friends as well as usual foreign suspects, and you.

Recent revelations about NSA's worldwide practices are globalization's toxic perfect storm. Technology we celebrated as a life-changing and everyman's (and child's) tool, we now find applied to spying on everyone with a phone, computer, bank account. It's chilling. In a country that historically prides itself for its civil liberties, led moreover by a constitutional lawyer whose election represented new heights in American civic consciousness, it's also humiliating that this should happen under Barack Obama's watch.

There's no cold war motive behind today's NSA spy plan; it's routine management of data—any data, even that of political allies. [Sobering news for the US public but for friendly European states too](#)

Should we not have expected these data-mining practices to emerge from the fundamentals of globalization and the worldwide net? A massive electronic 'net' is what the US surveillance system is, capturing anything that's swimming in our virtual rivers of data. Ask yourself: Why would any modern day CIA type spy machine limit itself to Chinese or Iranian targets?

Still, I like you am stunned by what's emerged from Guardian newspaper reports on US and British surveillance revealed by former NSA contractor Edward Snowden. Snowden's disclosures also detail how British spy agency GCHQ works with its American counterpart to target European allies. This revelation is bound to cause political fallout, if citizen outrage is not enough.

Pausing to reflect on how vast this cyber spy-net is, we would have to admit that it's a logical if loathsome outcome of the interconnectedness of all of us today. If any child can so easily access friends and information through common search engines, why not a nefarious force with unlimited resources? If reporters can hack phones in search of scandals, why not governments? If young geeks can pierce a nation's military files, why can't the latter do the same through its super computers and by intimidating the private companies to whom we surrender data about personal habits and finances?

We thank people of conscience like Snowden for alerting us that there is another side to our open access society. His disclosures complement the observations of longtime media critic Robert McChesney. In his prescient new book [“Digital Disconnect, How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy”](#), McChesney points to the erosion of our democratic ideals

by people-friendly companies that collect our data. Google and the like are the Fords and General Electrics of the modern era, as driven by capitalist ideals as those early pioneers. In “Digital Disconnect” McChesney warns us that contrary to our notion that internet access is a protected democratizing tool, in fact, it is turning out to be a modern way for corporate interests to control and exploit the public.

What can we do? We can self-censor, i.e. disconnect... somewhat. And we can unite. Communities across the board—educational, medical, media, legal, ethnic groups must comprehend our shared vulnerability and our common tools. Muslims need no longer view themselves as a select target of these odious systems; while the rest of the community must acknowledge that ‘Muslim danger’ is a pretext to sweep us all into the net.

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