

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2013/06/14/surveillance-and-the-corporate-state/>

Surveillance and the Corporate State

Spying, Control and Murder under the Imperial Presidency

by ROB URIE
June 14-16, 2013

With all of the fear mongering the subject has received in recent decades, Americans have in fact had remarkably little to fear directly from ‘terrorism.’ While actual attacks have been spectacular—they were designed to garner attention, they are both rare and far less dangerous than opportunistic politicians and the dim bureaucrats of the ‘security’ state care to communicate. As comedian Stephen Colbert (correctly) pointed out, including the attacks of September 11, 2001 and more recently in Boston, more Americans have died from furniture falling on them than from terrorist attacks. Depending on which statistics you choose, 10X – 20X more Americans die *every year* from (preventable) medical errors than have died in the entirety of U.S. history from terrorist attacks. In practical terms, terrorism is among the least probable threats Americans face.

The George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations would have us believe they, and the corporate-state they represent, have something to do with this. That is, they argue the threat is real but they stand as effective shields between terrorists and the citizenry. In fact, George W. Bush was warned of the September 11, 2001 attacks so many times and so loudly by U.S. and overseas intelligence agencies and prominent world leaders before they occurred the fact they did occur falls clearly on his failure of leadership, not on an absence of information the attacks were coming. As history has it, Bush administration actions were so egregious Mr. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney both refused to give legally binding testimony on what they knew prior to the attacks.

And before the Boston bombings the FBI was repeatedly warned by Russian intelligence the accused bombers posed a credible threat. Even more spectacularly, the full surveillance program imagined, built and explained to prevent exactly the kind of acts that occurred in Boston failed to prevent them— even with the addition of specific warnings regarding the specific people who carried them out. To the portion of the citizenry who favor police-state intrusion, the ‘false’ choice of surveillance or security in this case provided the surveillance without providing the security. And the few attacks that have occurred have been extremely efficient at promoting the interests of security-state charlatans and opportunists with no discernable benefit to the populace in return.

These facts are known to the Obama administration, the Pentagon, the NSA, the CIA and various and sundry spy agencies. And despite the assertions ‘we’ have been saved from nebulous and lightly specified attacks on numerous occasions, those detailed are largely FBI ‘sting’ operations where the FBI convinced marginalized, desperate people to carry out plots it conceived, engineered, financed and controlled. By reports, had the FBI and its paid informants not conceived the plots they never would have been conceived. The government is manufacturing fake terrorists and failing to stop ‘real’ terrorists while creating a totalitarian technocracy to solve the relatively small problem of non-state violence against the citizenry. Stupidity alone cannot explain what is going on here.

What building fear of low probability events into the monster that is going to devour us has accomplished is to facilitate the launch of poorly conceived military adventures and to effectively sell the evolution of the U.S. (the West, actually) into a corporate-fascist surveillance state. The problem of ‘terrorism’ is microscopic compared with the expensive catastrophe of the private healthcare system and half the population living in poverty. Using social resources to reduce medical ‘errors’ would save many multiples of ‘American lives’ more than surveillance and control against a contrived ‘enemy.’ And against history, the creation and funding of a large bureaucracy devoted to ‘security’ has produced a self-perpetuating political economy now instantiated into nearly all public and private institutions.

By reports, more than one million people, overwhelmingly civilians working for ‘private’ corporations, have top security clearance to serve the surveillance state. As for-profit businesses, surveillance for state ‘interests’ is but one line of enterprise with similar information quite often serving ‘purely’ commercial purposes. As the FBI is in the process of demonstrating, paying large numbers of people to find ‘terrorists’ means they will either find or manufacture them to justify paychecks and profits. And one way the CIA reportedly got around its Church Commission prohibition against domestic spying was by purchasing the information from commercial sources—the agency ‘self’ interpreted the law to read it could purchase and use the information as long as it didn’t directly collect it. But this is legal sophistry—the intent of the original law was to prohibit government agencies from spying on U.S. citizens. And clever parsing of the language doesn’t convert lawlessness to law.

To the uninitiated, Mr. Obama is either lying or ignorant of the facts of what ‘his’ government is doing regarding spying on U.S. citizens. The ‘metadata’ he admits is being collected is in fact the only ‘efficient’ way to find the ‘micro-data,’ the specific content of the phone calls, emails, text messages etc. being recorded and digitally stored to be turned into information ‘useful’ to the

corporate-state. The NSA has been conducting keyword searches of digital communications for decades now. The analytical challenge with doing this is one of timing—once a communication containing a keyword has taken place it must be retrieved to be analyzed. Only content that has been stored can be retrieved. The metadata has analytical content by itself, but why would the NSA have foregone keyword and key-phrase surveillance when fiber-optic cable now carries digitized phone calls as well as data? The reasonable assumption, and what has now apparently been exposed, is every digital transmission that is connected to external sources (e.g. Internet, phone lines, satellite) is recorded and reviewed by corporate – government computer programs and those ‘of interest’ are passed on to ‘analysts.’

The argument frequently appears the quantity of information being intercepted and recorded renders it useless—the human effort required to analyze it would employ half the population of the planet against the other half. What isn’t understood in this view is the power of computer programs to turn ‘metadata’ into actionable information before actual human beings ever see it. The keyword search is one fairly primitive example. Many who use the Internet understand the corporate practice of ‘profiling’ visitors to websites down to the products and services they glide over without actually clicking on. This data is aggregated in various configurations and used to craft web content to the thus-determined interests of ‘consumers.’

There are two points to consider here—profiles regarding political leanings, sexual orientation, medical history, arrests, debts etc. are as easy to create and distribute as any commercial profile and the practice of customizing content can be used for nefarious purposes by the corporate-state. An example of how the latter works is some Internet searches yield dramatically different results depending on the ‘profile’ of the person doing the search. Were the political left, right, or any combination thereof to materially challenge the creeping fascism of the corporate state, or simply rebel at the power of large banks to steal houses through fraudulent foreclosures, detailed profiles including names, family relations, employers, financial records, political affiliations, websites visited, phones calls made and on and on ad infinitum can be compiled with a few lines of computer code. Additionally, any electronic means of social organization or communication can be manipulated to craft perceptions, distribute disinformation or simply shut down social webs in the corporate state’s claimed interests.

Deeming this far-fetched requires ignorance of both existing technologies and recent American history. The FBI’s CointelPro program against left-leaning political organizations in the 1960s and 1970s had the essential elements of police-state excess. The FBI used murder, ad hoc violence, bombings, disinformation and paid informants to disrupt and destroy the Black Panthers, the Weather Underground and various anti-war groups, going so far as to target Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X for surveillance, disinformation and assorted dirty tricks (and possibly murder). Against Occupy Wall Street the Federal and local governments used the electronic spying and disruption methods outlined above along with ‘pre-emptive’ kidnappings to prevent protesters from protesting, informants, entrapment and extreme violence. As FBI files recently released under the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) indicate, any left-wing group opposed to government policies is considered ‘terrorist.’

The counter argument typically put forward by connected rich white men (New York Times’ David Brooks and Tom Friedman), that targets of police-state excess shouldn’t have been doing

what they were doing, requires a near complete ignorance of history for its power. The American Revolution was certainly illegitimate in this view—Americans weren't Americans when the Revolution began, they were Brits rebelling against the British government. Furthermore, there is little unity of circumstance amongst the citizenry—the interests of employer and employee, rich and poor, historical 'in' and 'out' groups, are not aligned. The Black Panthers arose from centuries of racial oppression with the simple demand the police and white racists stop murdering them and their families and communities. The Weather Underground blew up buildings to bring an end to the murder of three and one-half million people (Robert McNamara's count) in a war that had been deemed a lost cause by the highest echelons of government a decade earlier. That the culpable bankers and war criminals Messrs. Brooks and Friedman socialize with don't even face criminal charges, let alone police violence, illustrates the class view embedded here.

Moreover, the argument state power is legitimate in an alleged democracy is premised on no one being above the law. George W. Bush, and likely Barack Obama in the near future, has limited ability to travel abroad for danger of being arrested on war crimes charges. And what better mode of perpetuating a rogue regime than to use state surveillance and control to quash legitimate political opposition, or even define what opposition is legitimate and what isn't? Moreover, the conceit if you're doing nothing wrong you have nothing to fear from police-state excess places no limits on state intrusion. Were David Brooks, Tom Friedman and their families to be roused from bed in the middle of the night and tasered, handcuffed and then pepper sprayed while the police tore the walls and floorboards from their houses looking for evidence of possible crimes, the world might be a safer place for the rest of us. Even more lawless variations of police actions were a regular occurrence against the socially marginal in the time and place I grew up in.

The superficially plausible argument none of the abuses of government power from surveillance technologies can be proven illegal relies on the premises all laws are 'legal' and that paradox and ambiguity can be resolved unilaterally by the Obama administration and government spy agencies in their own favor. In fact, the Obama administration has claimed the rights of secret laws governing secret technologies used for secret purposes against secret 'suspects' based on secret 'evidence' reviewed by secret commissions housed in secret locations to be legal. In the broadest possible terms, the U.S. Constitution states otherwise. Mr. Obama simply does not have the legal right to spy on and murder U.S. citizens any more than the Bush administration did.

And liberal Democrat Barack Obama has led the most aggressive efforts of investigation and extreme sanction in American history against the 'whistleblowers' that have been the only sources of information on the workings of government available. When combined with Mr. Obama's claim to the right to murder U.S. citizens without judicial review based on secret interpretations of secret laws that rely on secret evidence to 'target' secret suspects in secret locations with secret weapons for secret reasons, it is ludicrous to assert full knowledge of government actions is a prerequisite to demanding both transparency and accountability.

The reaction of official Washington to disclosures of its malfeasance has been to use positions of power to lie about the nature of the threat—improbable 'terrorism' versus the corporate-state fascism that keeps it in office and earning profits; to lie about the nature of the malfeasance—

trashing the Constitution to claim rights and privileges for itself the Constitution specifically prohibits; and to charge the actions of Edward Snowden in disclosing the information he did to be an enemy of the people rather than one of the few citizens in recent history who has acted in the name of community and justice rather than against it. The role of prominent Democrats in all of these suggests ‘voters’ counting on political resolution at the polls remain deluded.

The U.S. in particular, and the West more broadly, is in a really bad spot right now. The half of the population that reportedly supports the intrusions of corporate-state fascists apparently sees itself out of harms’ way because of political-economic privilege and / or because it still trusts Mr. Obama to ‘do the right thing.’ However, Mr. Obama is doing with the imperial Presidency exactly what his predecessor, George W. Bush did with it—use it to perpetuate his own power through surveillance, control and murder. And those who still trust Mr. Obama haven’t been paying attention to his unyieldingly corporatist policies against the citizenry. One immediately necessary step is to give political support to Edward Snowden and other truth-tellers of corporate state malfeasance. Another is to conceive of political change outside the corporate-fascist state increasingly in evidence.