

One Nation Under CCTV.

“IS SURVEILLANCE making us safer?”

“There was, of course, no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. ... You had to live did live, from habit that became instinct in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.”
- George Orwell, “1984”

Is this Orwellian society that far off?

Sociologist Jeremy Bentham developed the theory of “Panopticon” in the late 18th century, which was a prison in which prisoners can be observed but could not see who was observing. This was the first time surveillance was used for social control and crime deterrent. The objective was to make each individual his or her own overseer, so there was no option but to conform. Centuries later, similar ideas and principles were applied to society at large. Now, movies like “Minority Report” which portray a futuristic view of surveillance, are beginning to ring true.

Great Britain itself has over four million CCTV cameras, and the average London citizen is captured on video 300 times a day. The United States’ terrorist watch list holds over 1,000,000 names. Video surveillance is a \$9.2 billion industry alone, and is projected to grow to \$21 billion in the next year. Your personal data is constantly being compiled, and can be retrieved instantly by thousands of people you’ve never met. Massive face recognition databases are exceptionally accurate and are becoming commonplace. Biometric scanners that read vein patterns are already being used, and ear and gait recognition and remote iris tracking are no longer fanciful fiction. The global homeland-security business is worth an estimated \$200 billion, and is taking on momentum of its own.



Security and surveillance is becoming more and more prominent and invasive in daily life. There are strong parallels between an Orwellian scenario and the conditions made possible by government’s surveillance capabilities. Instead of communism, the public fears terrorism and violence. Although surveillance is not as pervasive in the United States, as it is in many countries, reality is not very far from fiction.

This begs the question:

Is sacrificing privacy for “security” really making us safer?

Security is essentially a trade-off. The question is if the trade-off is actually worth it. Is the level of security gained worth the costs, whether in money, in liberties, in privacy or in convenience?

As technology has continued to progress and improve, the ability to infringe on constitutional rights has increased as well. Surveillance is a concern because of its infringement on the freedom of speech and the privacy and anonymity guarded by the First and Fourth Amendment.

Privacy is an issue, for many reasons, one being because of surveillance vulnerabilities, but because of profiling errors, and abuse. Anyone can be watching and listening due to blatant vulnerabilities in surveillance systems make it possible for almost anyone to gain access. Another issue is that certain types of people will receive more resistance from the system than others. Deidre Mulligan, director of Samuelson Law, says, “those with external characteristics that suggest you’re different -- whether you wear a turban or a veil -- are watched more than the rest of us. Just because the technology watches everybody, the fact of the matter is that different people are watched differently.” An example of this is the TSA’s watch list implementation. This could present further problems than it already does.

When asked about the trade-off of privacy for security, expert Bruce Schneier, said, “A lot of security measures are very much of a feel-good nature. They’re not effective but are meant to look effective...My prediction is, absent serious soul-searching and a Congress that will put principles over politics, long term there will probably be some sort of popular backlash. We get most of our security from liberty.”

There are other losses besides personal freedoms that accompany a surveillance society. Kim Taipale, director of the Center for Advanced Studies in Science and Technology, stated the following in a recent interview. “We need to be careful that in designing security systems we are not...imposing intolerable burdens on functionality. Open systems respond better to unforeseen events by allowing new ideas, new entrants, and innovation to emerge through free markets.”

Citizens in areas of frequent crime, the political leaders, and police officials often view surveillance systems as the obvious solution to crime. Almost no consideration is given to the expanded surveillance infrastructure's impacts on privacy and on the relationship between the government and the people. Instead security needs to be collaboration. Former Governor Jerry Brown, agrees, saying, "Reducing crime is something the community and police must work on together. Installing surveillance cameras will not make us safe. It should also not be forgotten that the intrusive powers of the state are growing with each passing decade." Rethinking security is the best method of minimizing losses of privacy and liberty.

Privacy is what guards us from threats by government, corporations and individuals. Security and surveillance is flawed, and is not moving in the direction it should be. The greatest strength comes from our freedoms, our openness, our liberties and our system of justice. Ben Franklin said it best. "Those who would give up essential liberty for temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

We simply need to rethink security and surveillance before we are forced to.



Re:Think...

security. More insightful security practices will protect both citizens and their liberties more than adding extra surveillance cameras.

Contact

Kevin Burton

kevin@thinkbam.com

480.239.9724

Angela McGee

angela@thinkbam.com

480.239.5647