

Big Brother USA: Surveillance, Secrecy and Control

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"We have now sunk to a depth at which restatement of the obvious is the first duty of intelligent men."(George Orwell, 1903-1950, Eric Arthur Blair, English novelist, essayist, and social critic, (author of the book "1984")

"I do not want to live in a world where everything I do and say is recorded. That is not something I am willing to support or live under." (Edward Snowden (1983-), American patriot who revealed the Police State tactics of the U.S. government, (June 10, 2013)

"In my estimation, there has not been in American history a more important leak than Edward Snowden's release of NSA material—and that definitely includes the Pentagon Papers 40 years ago. Snowden's whistleblowing gives us the possibility to roll back a key part of what has amounted to an 'executive coup' against the U.S. Constitution." (Daniel Ellsberg (1931-) American economist and military analyst. (In 1971, during the Richard Nixon administration, he released a top-secret [Pentagon](#) study of U.S. government decision-making in relation to the [Vietnam War](#))

"When the president does it, that means that it is not illegal. By definition." Richard M. Nixon (1913-1994), (British reporter David Frost's interview with President Richard Nixon broadcast in May 1977)

Some American presidents reveal their true character only during their second terms. Without the obligation to campaign for a re-election and with leaks of past misbehavior, the mask of pretense falls and the person's true colors show. Then more inappropriate behavior and abuse of power follow and scandal tends to pile upon scandal. It happened to President Richard M. Nixon, also known as "tricky Dick". It is now happening to President Barack H. Obama.

In the case of President Richard Nixon, his second term was mired by a series of events surrounding the Watergate Scandal and other allegations of political spying and sabotage conducted on behalf of his 1972 re-election. On October 20, 1973, Nixon used strong-armed tactics to have Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox, who had been appointed to investigate the Watergate scandal and White House cover-ups, fired. Soon afterwards, [impeachment proceedings](#) in the House of Representatives began, resulting in President Nixon's resignation less than one year later, on August 9, 1974.

President Barack Obama has begun his second term with a [series of scandals](#). Just a few months after his re-election, instances of abuse of power began to surface at a fast pace. The most serious scandal is the revelation that the U.S. government is involved in warrantless surveillance, keeping track of telephone calls and Internet emails of Americans, including those of journalists and reporters.

This revelation, in addition to the fact that the Obama administration has had the IRS targeting conservative groups—a throw-back to the Nixon administration targeting the income tax returns of Nixon’s “enemies”—is a direct violation of the [Fourth Amendment](#) of the U.S. Constitution guaranteeing the right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizure, and of the First Amendment [that](#) prohibits the making of any law ... infringing on the [freedom of the press](#).

It is very difficult for a police state-to-be to be respectful of the country’s constitution, because when a government gives itself the power to access private financial, medical, consumer sales records like book purchases, besides Toll records, phone calls and Internet communications and searches, without the consent of the law abiding individuals concerned and with no court order, it nearly automatically attacks the democratic rights of privacy of the people. When government officials secretly snoop on citizens and begin infringing on individual freedom and privacy, the worm is in the apple.

A country cannot be a totalitarian state and a democratic state at the same time. —It has to choose one way or the other. I would add that it cannot be both a military empire and a democratic republic, either. That is because an empire requires a high degree of centralization of power and information, while a democracy needs a decentralization of power and information. Historically, when a country became imperialistic and militaristic, like Germany in the 1930s, it also ceases being democratic even if for a while it keeps the trappings of democracy.

What is troubling in the case of the Obama administration and in the case of the preceding Bush administration is the admission by surveillance officials that they were proceeding according to “secret laws” or “secret interpretations of laws”, that they were alone judge and jury.

During the Nixon impeachment hearings, much was made about the crucial distinction between a “government of men” vs. a “government of laws”. If men in power can do whatever they want, irrespective of due process, the country is not a democracy. It may be a royalty, an empire or a dictatorship, but it is not a democratic republic.

There would not be a new debate about these issues if some people had not stepped forward to provide information about what those men were doing in secrecy. Indeed, in June 2013, a young American named [Edward Snowden](#), who can only be considered a true patriot since he has the U.S. Constitution on his side, rendered a tremendous service to his fellow Americans and to humanity in revealing the [Police State tactics](#) used by the U.S. government to follow the private whereabouts of law abiding citizens. For this courageous and deserving act, Edward Snowden should probably be awarded the [2013 Nobel Peace Prize](#), if that distinction has any meaning after a committee of Norwegian politicians wrongfully awarded it, in 2009, to Barack Hussein Obama who hardly deserved it, having done nothing to promote peace and freedom besides uttering vague pronouncements, and having instead increased drone killings of innocent people around the world.

What we must realize, indeed, is that the government, politicians and bureaucrats never have enough information on the citizens they are supposed to serve, and they can be expected to use all the available techniques to obtain it.

Freedom and individual liberty are always threatened by governments that have force on their side, all the more so when the technology becomes available to watch individuals and

would-be government critics, blackmail them, intimidate them and reduce them to silence and, ultimately, to de facto silent and docile robots. A truly respectable statesman would refrain from such practice, but ordinary politicians and their entourage can be expected to place the government agenda front and center and their personal interests and those of their allies above the common good.

Indeed, while it is true that the moral ground of any administration is set by whoever is president at the time, it is his entourage, the permanent as well as the transient bureaucracy that wishes to extend its power to the limit. In any government, there will always be a [John Yoo](#) or a [Kenneth Wainstein](#) who will justify extending the Police State embrace to its utmost. There will always be a sycophant within the administration who is going to write a “legal” memo to justify torture, to install a warrantless snooping system on the private lives of individuals or to justify launching an illegal war of aggression against another country. That is to be expected.

That is why the character of the people we elect to the highest office is of paramount importance, because they choose what type of people will run the government. They even choose who sits on the Supreme Court. When people realize that they have been duped, it is usually too late. The damage is already done. The only recourse, when available, is to initiate costly impeachment proceedings.

Now, thanks to Edward Snowden and journalist Glenn Greenwald, we know that the U.S. government, and the governments of four other “democratic” countries (the so-called “second-party partners”: U.K., Canada, Australia and New Zealand) have amassed tons of electronic information on the private lives of every citizen in their country, without the knowledge of the people themselves, thus opening the door to [blackmail](#), intimidation, repression and any other abuse you can imagine. With a code and a name, they can zoom in on one individual and know everything about him or her. And you can be sure that once that information has been collected, the circle of those who will have access to such private information will get wider and wider. —Frightening stuff indeed.

And don’t expect to get the truth from government officials, since the U.S. Director of National Intelligence apparatus, [James Clapper](#), has admitted that he had given U.S. Senators “the least untruthful answer possible” during a hearing on the issue of secret warrantless surveillance of Americans. If U.S. Senators are lied to, imagine the fate of the ordinary citizen! For instance, officials or politicians will tell you that such and such illegal program has been stopped, without telling you that it is continuing under a new name.

What is scary is not only the lying and the illegality, but the Gestapo-like tactics of [character assassination](#) that supporters of the Police State launch against those who only followed their duty and conscience in revealing the secret unlawful attacks against the people’s constitutional rights. This is a pattern that one finds in a totalitarian state, not in a true democracy, and it is another indication that the political and moral decay runs deep in the American society, especially in the nomenklatura of the U.S. [military-industrial complex](#) that President Dwight Eisenhower warned us against some fifty years ago.

Not surprisingly, the revelation about the extent of the Obama administration’s secret surveillance program on Americans has resulted in Barack Obama dropping in the [polls](#) and has spurred demands for his [impeachment](#)—and this only six months after his re-election. This is somewhat reminiscent of the Nixon era. It would be ironic if the first black American president goes down in history as the new Nixon!

We thought the Internet would liberate people. Little did we know it is turning into an instrument of tyranny in the hands of “Big Brother” government! “Big Brother” has found a way to open your emails and keep records of people you have contacted and who have communicated with you and who have communicated with other individuals that you don’t even know. With the knowledge of these so-called contact chains, “Big Brother” is now in a position to know more about you than you do yourself!

The sad truth is that we increasingly live in a managed democracy where elections are rigged, where propaganda is rampant and where a money aristocracy runs most of everything, using old-fashioned Soviet-style techniques of control and propaganda. In the U.S., when the huge [Utah data gathering center](#) that the government is building is completed, the government will have all the information it wants on any individual, and things will likely get much worse. This is because a global militaristic empire naturally needs a worldwide net of information on people. That is why also it must keep enlarging its global electronic espionage programs.

One totalitarian state disappears; another quickly takes its place. Maybe President Thomas Jefferson was right when he said that “every generation needs a new revolution.”

Prof. Rodrigue Tremblay, a Canadian-born economist, is the author of the book [“The Code for Global Ethics, Ten Humanist Principles”](#), and of [“The New American Empire”](#))

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