

# Monitoring the Public After Coronavirus

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*It is too early to say when or even whether the siege initiated by the coronavirus will end, but many Americans and Europeans are speculating over what kind of countries will emerge on the other side. National Security Agency (NSA) whistleblower Edward Snowden, who exposed illegal spying on American citizens, [recently predicted that](#) there would be a “slide into a less liberal and less free world,” that the surveillance systems being created to monitor the spread of the disease would become an “architecture of oppression.” To be sure he has a point in that governments have historically used crises to expand their powers. After the crisis is over, the emergency power granted to manage the activity of the people tends to be retained.*

Much depends on the lessons learned from what is being done to contain the virus currently. If testing and “keep your distance” does not succeed in checking the spread of the disease and restoring a version of what once was normal life, harsher and more permanent measures might prevail. Alexander Dugin [foresees](#) a “military-medical” dictatorship developing.

The rapid spread of the virus has also spawned some unusual conspiracy theories. One claims that the virus was actually [developed in the United States](#), stolen from a lab by Chinese scientists and then released in China before being allowed to propagate worldwide as part of a communist conspiracy to destroy the economy and political system in the U.S. Another has cast Bill Gates as the villain, [claiming that](#) he had a hand in the appearance of the virus as part of a nefarious plot to take over global health care. The megalomaniacal Gates certainly is to blame for using his wealth and status to promote a universal “health” surveillance system for the post-coronavirus world, but that he might have been behind the appearance of the virus itself is certainly a bit of a stretch. Still other theories connect the appearance of coronavirus [to 5G telecommunications technology](#).

The reality of to what degree the national security state that already exists tightens its grip based on a continuing medical emergency pretty much depends on how the virus itself reacts to summer heat and the measures being taken to contain it. Meanwhile, there have been some decidedly extreme proposals about what the United States and other nations might consider doing to seize and maintain the high ground in the battle against a still proliferating, highly contagious and lethal disease.

The key to stopping the spread of the virus, most authorities would agree, is to test and monitor nearly all the public, to force them if needs be to maintain distance from individuals who are already infected. There have been several proposals for how to do that ranging from testing nearly everyone and issuing health ID cards based on the results, with those individuals considered contagious or especially vulnerable being subject to quarantine or

some form of further isolation. One over-the-top plan would make the health status of individuals recorded and updated on a chip readable by government scanners that would be permanently embedded in everyone's body.

The plan that appears to have the best possibility of being adopted is being promoted in a joint venture by Apple and Google that appears to have White House support. [Bloomberg reports that](#)

“Apple Inc. and Google unveiled a rare partnership to add technology to their smartphone platforms that will alert users if they have come into contact with a person with Covid-19. People must opt in to the system, but it has the potential to monitor about a third of the world's population.”

The monitoring would be done by central computers and once the principle is established that phones can be manipulated there are no technical or practical limits to what other tasks could be included. That means that the observation made by protagonist Winston Smith in George Orwell's "1984" has finally been realized. Smith was doing the mandatory half hour of exercise daily in front of his television, but when he began to slack off a voice from the tv set admonished him. He then accepted that in theory the government was actually capable of surveilling everyone all the time and might in fact be doing so. Well George and Winston, we have finally arrived at 1984.

Even if coronavirus fades into obscurity, government might plausibly exploit the fear created by it to push hard that a surveillance mechanism be continued and even expanded to prevent its recurrence or the development of future pandemics. That is what the "science" tells one is the right thing to do, at least according to some scientists, but it ignores individual liberty of association, guaranteed by the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights in the United States Constitution. The U.S. and other governments have long demonstrated that when it comes to individual freedom versus the ability of the state to impose a statist uniformity, the rules makers will always win out. 9/11, for example, produced the Patriot and Military Commission Acts that have considerably abridged personal liberty in America, even though the threat of terrorism was overstated at the time and has considerably receded ever since. Yet, unfathomably, the Patriot Act has survived and keeps getting renewed by Congress.

Predictably perhaps, presidential son-in-law and jack of all trades Jared Kushner, fresh from his failure to bring peace to the Middle East, has been placed in charge of [a White House task force](#) that will determine how and when to develop a pandemic surveillance system which will also link those ill to hospital centers for mandatory screening and treatment. The argument being made is that tracking nearly everyone would enable the identification and quarantining of those who are sick in nearly real time, controlling the spread of future viruses that has up until now been impossible. That the information would be collected into a national data base appears to be part of the program and it would, of course, include information on the patient's location and activities.

As social media is already being manipulated and controlled by the government working hand-in-hand with the oligarchs who own and operate the sites, the ability to further isolate members of the public so as to preempt the development of any genuine resistance to state policies might well be seen as highly desirable. It would be a gift to a developing police state to be able to know where everyone is at any given time and be able to intuit what they

might be doing. Real troublemakers could be further identified and singled out for special attention.

And one should note that it all comes at a time of great vulnerability to both revolution and repression, when representative government is under siege in many countries, unable to control the narrative as it once did. Donald Trump in a tweet barrage last Friday [called on his followers](#) to “liberate” Michigan, Minnesota and Virginia because he disapproved of the policies on coronavirus and gun control being advanced by their respective governors, all Democrats. Calling for the overthrow of state governments is illegal, a call to insurrection, but Trump apparently believes that having survived one impeachment attempt he is now untouchable. If many Americans begin to take Trump’s exhortations literally, it could be a sign that the admittedly dystopian political equilibrium in the U.S. is about to spin out of control.

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