

Protecting the Public from the Police? Will U.S. Law Enforcement Use Body Cameras to Monitor Themselves?

Obama Proposes \$75 Million to Purchase Body Cameras for U.S. Police Departments

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Protests in US cities and towns has continued to make headlines over the acquittal of the police officers involved in the unjustified homicides in Ferguson, Missouri involving the shooting death of Michael Brown and in New York City where Eric Garner's death was the result of a chokehold by the NYPD. Now the Obama Administration and police departments across the US are in agreement to have the police wear body cameras to record their actions when they interact with the public. Eric Garner's death was recorded by the public, but the police officers responsible for his death were acquitted by the jury. Since the tragic deaths of both Micheal Brown and Eric Garner, the Obama administration is now seeking \$263 million to purchase body cameras so that any wrongdoing by the police can be recorded. The funds will also be used to "better train police officers."

For some reason, I find that hard to believe. Something does not sound right with this picture. "President Barack Obama announced Monday that he will seek \$263 million in order to better train police officers - and a large chunk of that money will fund the purchase of roughly 50,000 body cameras" RT News reported. In all, President Obama wants congress to approve \$75 million to purchase 50,000 body cameras for police officers across the U.S. while continuing the transfer of military equipment to state and local police departments with a "controversial Pentagon program which transfers old equipment - including vehicles and other military gear - to local police departments will remain largely intact." The report also stated funding to improve training and reform law enforcement agencies were also in the bill, but a large portion would allow for the creation of "outreach programs intended to build trust between communities and law enforcement, The Hill reported." Improving training to police departments while sending military grade weapons hardly seems comforting to the public. Body cameras would not change anything; in fact it would only add another tool for authorities to increase their surveillance capabilities to monitor the public. Earlier this year, an article published by Jay Stanley, a Senior Policy Analyst at the *American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)* titled 'Big Data, George Orwell, and Tanks' explains why video surveillance and other gadgets used by law enforcement is not a good idea:

Of course the effects of particular tools and technologies are not always open-and-shut; often they are contested. We're seeing that play out today with regard to video surveillance, for example. Police departments are increasingly putting video surveillance cameras up in our public spaces—often entire networks of them (despite the fact that every day there is less and less reason

to do so). But at the same time, individuals are using their own cameras to record what the police do—and too often finding police attempting to (mis)use their authority to stop them from doing so. And into the middle of this contested space comes the far more ambiguous police body cameras, which could serve one function or the other depending on the nitty-gritty details of the rules governing their deployment.

How could Big Data analytics help individuals? In theory, where data sets are made available to all, they could expand individuals' access to information about the world and enable oversight over their government or companies. Big Data could also help empower individuals by allowing them to analyze their own data.

But unfortunately transparency is usually a hard-fought result—normally institutions fight to keep their data to themselves. And sometimes there will be privacy issues that make opening up databases legitimately problematic.

One other problem with the police carrying body cameras is that they are aimed at civilians, not the police. They will be used by the police to collect evidence against people who commit crimes but it can be used against a person who might fall under any suspicion. This is why very few police departments and other intelligence agencies have opposed body cameras. It is just another way of recording individuals or groups (protesters) for its mega databases. Recently, surveillance cameras have been outfitted with facial recognition technology as *PhysOrg.com* reported in 2012:

A new surveillance camera by Hitachi Kokusai Electric can look at footage that contains an image of someone, either still or video, and then search other video or still images on file for other instances of that same face. It can search, process and display up to thirty six million faces in just one second. Each hit is displayed immediately, in thumbnail form, which its makers say, allows the camera to display the actions of a person prior to, or after, being seen by the surveillance camera.

Police departments across the U.S. are adopting a facial recognition systems. The Chicago Police Department has the system in place as the Chicago Sun Times reported last year when a crime took place. It stated:

Pierre Martin's face sealed his fate. Earlier this year, Martin became the first person in Chicago arrested as a result of a little-known Chicago Police Department high-tech program just getting started, which uses facial-recognition software.

Police had a photo captured on a CTA surveillance camera on Jan. 28 of a suspected mugger, looking to the side, after he had just allegedly stolen a cellphone from a man at gunpoint on a Pink Line train. Police also had an ocean of photos for comparison — 4.5 million criminal booking shots. They ran the program. And Pierre Martin ranked No. 1 on a list no one wants to top.

Makes me think about how surveillance is used in the U.K., home of George Orwell. This past summer, BBC news reported that *"Met Police officers are to start wearing cameras on their uniforms as part of plans to boost transparency and accelerate convictions. The cameras are designed to capture evidence at crime scenes."* But others who oppose the plan such as Jack Hart of the *'The Freedom Association'* *"says the move means "everyone is under*

suspicion” according to the report. With cameras on every corner in British society, the police with cameras only means more surveillance.

Imagine the future where facial recognition, domestic drones both armed and unarmed, satellites and now police officers with cameras recording you 24 hours a day. Adding to the list, government databases with criminal mugshots and facebook profiles allows the police to have more facial data to work with. Therefore, the constant monitoring of the public is inevitable. If people were afraid of being identified and prosecuted, would they be willing to participate in peaceful protests? That is a good question.

The U.K. has roughly 6 million CCTV cameras. The UK is considered by many security experts, one of the most surveilled countries on the planet. An individual’s right to privacy is evaporating. Governments and their intelligence agencies, along with the police on both the local and state level say that good people have nothing to hide, but with facial recognition, all types of cameras recording you, NSA wire taps, the concept of privacy is almost non-existent. Let’s be clear, not all police officers are bad actors, some do believe that the technology is a weapon to fight against real criminals, but then again, there are those who will obey their superiors in the name of fighting terrorists.

So the question is, who is a terrorist? Read Robert Wenzel’s ‘85 Things That Might Get You on a DHS Terrorist Watch List’ on Economic Policy Journal published in 2012 to answer that question. When people know that they are being watched and judged and behave differently, it is because they conform. We can call it the Hawthorne Effect when individuals improve their behavior when they become aware that they are being observed. This is what governments of the U.K. and U.S. prefer, a docile population run by an elite class and its corporations that can dominate the population through its surveillance technology. With this type of technology they impose fear among the population because they are constantly being watched. Unfortunately, this is what George Orwell warned humanity about a long time ago.

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