

The FBI: America's Secret Police

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We want no Gestapo or secret police. The FBI is tending in that direction. They are dabbling in sex-life scandals and plain blackmail. J. Edgar Hoover would give his right eye to take over, and all congressmen and senators are afraid of him.—President Harry S. Truman

Secret police. Secret courts. Secret government agencies. Surveillance. Intimidation tactics. Harassment. Torture. Brutality. Widespread corruption. Entrapment schemes.

These are the hallmarks of every authoritarian regime from the Roman Empire to modern-day America, yet it's the secret police—tasked with silencing dissidents, ensuring compliance, and maintaining a climate of fear—who sound the death knell for freedom in every age.

Every regime has its own name for its secret police: Mussolini's OVRA carried out phone surveillance on government officials. Stalin's NKVD carried out large-scale purges, terror and depopulation. Hitler's Gestapo went door to door ferreting out dissidents and other political "enemies" of the state. And in the U.S., it's the Federal Bureau of Investigation that does the dirty work of ensuring compliance, keeping tabs on potential dissidents, and punishing those who dare to challenge the status quo.

Whether the FBI is planting undercover agents in churches, synagogues and mosques; issuing fake emergency letters to gain access to Americans' phone records; using intimidation tactics to silence Americans who are critical of the government, or persuading impressionable individuals to plot acts of terror and then entrapping them, the overall impression of the nation's secret police force is that of a well-dressed thug, flexing its muscles and doing the boss' dirty work.

Indeed, a far cry from the glamorized G-men depicted in Hollywood film noirs and spy thrillers, the government's henchmen have become the embodiment of how power, once acquired, can be so easily corrupted and abused.

Case in point: the FBI is being sued after its agents, lacking sufficient evidence to acquire a search warrant, disabled a hotel's internet and then impersonated Internet repair technicians in order to gain access to a hotel suite and record the activities of the room's occupants. Justifying the warrantless search as part of a sting on internet gambling, FBI officials insisted that citizens should not expect the same right to privacy in the common room of a hotel suite as they would at home in their bedroom.

Far from being tough on crime, FBI agents are also among the nation's most notorious lawbreakers. In fact, in addition to creating certain crimes in order to then "solve" them, the FBI also gives certain informants permission to break the law, "including everything from

buying and selling illegal drugs to bribing government officials and plotting robberies,” in exchange for their cooperation on other fronts. *USA Today* estimates that agents have authorized criminals to engage in as many as 15 crimes a day. Some of these informants are getting paid astronomical sums: one particularly unsavory fellow, later arrested for attempting to run over a police officer, was actually paid \$85,000 for his help laying the trap for an entrapment scheme.

In a stunning development reported by *The Washington Post*, a probe into misconduct by an FBI agent has resulted in the release of at least a dozen convicted drug dealers from prison. Several suspects awaiting trial have also been freed, and more could be released as the unnamed agent’s caseload comes under scrutiny. As the *Post* reports: “The scope and type of alleged misconduct by the agent have not been revealed, but defense lawyers involved in the cases described the mass freeing of felons as virtually unprecedented—and an indication that convictions could be in jeopardy. Prosecutors are periodically faced with having to drop cases over police misconduct, but it is unusual to free those who have been found guilty.”

In addition to procedural misconduct, trespassing, enabling criminal activity, and damaging private property, the FBI’s laundry list of crimes against the American people includes surveillance, disinformation, blackmail, entrapment, intimidation tactics, and harassment.

For example, the Associated Press recently lodged a complaint with the Dept. of Justice after learning that FBI agents created a fake AP news story and emailed it, along with a clickable link, to a bomb threat suspect in order to implant tracking technology onto his computer and identify his location. Lambasting the agency, AP attorney Karen Kaiser railed, “The FBI may have intended this false story as a trap for only one person. However, the individual could easily have reposted this story to social networks, distributing to thousands of people, under our name, what was essentially a piece of government disinformation.”

Then again, to those familiar with COINTELPRO, an FBI program created to “disrupt, misdirect, discredit, and neutralize” groups and individuals the government considers politically objectionable, it should come as no surprise that the agency has mastered the art of government disinformation.

The FBI has been particularly criticized in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks for targeting vulnerable individuals and not only luring them into fake terror plots but actually equipping them with the organization, money, weapons and motivation to carry out the plots—entrapment—and then jailing them for their so-called terrorist plotting. This is what the FBI characterizes as “forward leaning—preventative—prosecutions.”

Another fallout from 9/11, National Security Letters, one of the many illicit powers authorized by the USA Patriot Act, allows the FBI to secretly demand that banks, phone companies, and other businesses provide them with customer information and not disclose the demands. An internal audit of the agency found that the FBI practice of issuing tens of thousands of NSLs every year for sensitive information such as phone and financial records, often in non-emergency cases, is riddled with widespread violations.

The FBI’s surveillance capabilities, on a par with the National Security Agency, boast a nasty collection of spy tools ranging from Stingray devices that can track the location of cell phones to Triggerfish devices which allow agents to eavesdrop on phone calls. In one case, the FBI actually managed to remotely reprogram a “suspect’s” wireless internet card so that

it would send “real-time cell-site location data to Verizon, which forwarded the data to the FBI.”

Now the FBI is seeking to expand its already invasive hacking powers to allow agents to hack into any computer, anywhere in the world. As journalist Brett Wilkins warns:

If the proposed rule change is approved, the FBI would have the power to unleash “network investigative techniques” against computers anywhere in the world, allowing the agency to secretly install malware and spyware on any computer, effectively allowing it to control that computer and all its stored information. The FBI could download all the computer’s digital contents, switch its camera or microphone on or off and even control other computers in its network.

And then there’s James Comey, current director of the FBI, who knows enough to say all the right things about the need to abide by the Constitution, all the while his agency routinely discards it. Comey has this idea that the government’s powers shouldn’t be limited, especially when it comes to carrying out surveillance on American citizens. Responding to reports that Apple and Google are creating smart phones that will be more difficult to hack into, Comey has been lobbying Congress and the White House to force technology companies to keep providing the government with backdoor access to Americans’ cell phones.

It’s not all Comey’s fault, though. This transformation of the FBI into a secret police force can be traced back to the days of J. Edgar Hoover. As author Anthony S. Summers points out, it was Hoover who “built the first federal fingerprint bank, and his Identification Division would eventually offer instant access to the prints of 159 million people. His Crime Laboratory became the most advanced in the world.”

Eighty years after Hoover instituted the FBI’s first fingerprint “database”—catalogued on index cards, no less—the agency’s biometric database has grown to massive proportions, the largest in the world, encompassing everything from fingerprints, palm, face and iris scans to DNA, and is being increasingly shared between federal, state and local law enforcement agencies in an effort to target potential criminals long before they ever commit a crime. This is what’s known as pre-crime.

If it were just about fighting the “bad guys,” that would be one thing. But as countless documents make clear, the FBI has a long track record of abusing its extensive powers in order to blackmail politicians, spy on celebrities and high-ranking government officials, and intimidate dissidents of all stripes. It’s an old tactic, used effectively by former authoritarian regimes.

In fact, as historian Robert Gellately documents, the Nazi police state was repeatedly touted as a model for other nations to follow, so much so that Hoover actually sent one of his right-hand men, Edmund Patrick Coffey, to Berlin in January 1938 at the invitation of Germany’s secret police. As Gellately noted, “[A]fter five years of Hitler’s dictatorship, the Nazi police had won the FBI’s seal of approval.”

Indeed, so impressed was the FBI with the Nazi order that, as the *New York Times* recently revealed, in the decades after World War II, the FBI, along with other government agencies, aggressively recruited at least a thousand Nazis, including some of Hitler’s highest

henchmen, brought them to America, hired them on as spies and informants, and then carried out a massive cover-up campaign to ensure that their true identities and ties to Hitler's holocaust machine would remain unknown. Moreover, anyone who dared to blow the whistle on the FBI's illicit Nazi ties found himself spied upon, intimidated, harassed and labeled a threat to national security.

So not only have American taxpayers have been paying to keep ex-Nazis on the government payroll for decades but we've been subjected to the very same tactics used by the Third Reich: surveillance, militarized police, overcriminalization, and a government mindset that views itself as operating outside the bounds of the law.

Yet as I point out in my book [A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State](#), it's no coincidence that the similarities between the American police state and past totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany grow more pronounced with each passing day. This is how freedom falls, and tyrants come to power.

Suffice it to say that when and if a true history of the FBI is ever written, it will not only track the rise of the American police state but it will also chart the decline of freedom in America: how a nation that once abided by the rule of law and held the government accountable for its actions has steadily devolved into a police state where justice is one-sided, a corporate elite runs the show, representative government is a mockery, police are extensions of the military, surveillance is rampant, privacy is extinct, and the law is little more than a tool for the government to browbeat the people into compliance.

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