

The Gamification of Tyranny, The Surveillance State. America and China

By [Kurt Nimmo](#)

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It looks like we're headed for a brave new world where all citizens are rated on their loyalty to the state and are punished for wandering from its narrative.

Call it the gamification of repression.

In China, the supposedly communist state—in fact, it is an advanced form of crony capitalist authoritarianism that Marx [and Mao] would have disapproved—is busy setting up a rating system for all citizens. According to a paper written by an academic at the Lebanese American University in Beirut, Lebanon, scores are based on professional conduct, corruption, type of products bought, peers' own scores, and tax evasion.

The author left something out, however. This social credit system will also be used to marginalize and stigmatize those who criticize the state.

China's nominally communist government says the system and its massive database will allow the trustworthy to roam freely under heaven while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step.

In addition to scrutinizing online activity and acting on tips by snitches, the system will tap into China's sprawling network of surveillance cameras, said to number around 200 million across the country. Facial recognition will ID individuals and follow their every move in search of behavior worthy of a low score. Those gaining a high score will be allowed access to credit facilities, cheaper public transport, and even shorter wait times for hospital services. They will also be banned from travel and decent employment.

Although the system isn't slated to be fully rolled out until 2020, pilot projects are already being used to ensnare enemies of the state. For instance, the journalist Liu Hu received a negative score and was blacklisted for criticizing China's political corruption. He is under house arrest, his social media accounts were shut down, and he is unable to travel. This is reminiscent of travel restrictions placed on dissidents in the Soviet Union.

If you think you're free of this kind of tyranny because you live in America, think again.

Everybody knows the NSA and its contractors are collecting our most private and intimate information. Travel bans are enforced through no-fly lists and these are imposed on political activists as well as the innocent caught up in the surveillance system. You can lose your position at a university for thought considered unacceptable to a politically correct orthodoxy. The state intervenes when a business concern refuses to sell products to people

the seller finds objectionable. In numerous ways, the state hinders, bans, and criminalizes behavior in parasitic fashion, the end result being overcrowded industrial prisons and a bounty in revenue generation through fines, assessments, penalties, and taxes.

Our social media accounts are scoured by the NSA, FBI, and the CIA for any sign of political misdeed. The state is able to monitor our behavior online in real-time. It has turned our cellphones into tracking devices. The tech giants often collaborate with the state and hand over our data without a constitutionally mandated search warrant. The data on our phones is surrendered at the border.

The latest signpost of ever encroaching corporatist-government fascism can be seen in the social media purge, which through evolution will ultimately remove all content from the internet deemed “extremist” by the state—and for the state that is everybody right or left who moves beyond permissible parameters set by the state.

Meanwhile, a huge internal security apparatus little different than what was used in the former Soviet Union is growing in size, arming itself to the teeth against the citizenry. It has deputized local law enforcement and showered it with all kinds of weapons, turning local police into armies controlled by the federal government.

Meanwhile, we are aghast at the behavior of China—or some of us are—and this is exploited to ramp up hostility toward China while buttressing Trump’s trade war. The ruling elite exploit the fear of China and Russia as part of an effort to check China’s move into a resource rich Africa and threaten Russia on its borders.

Most important is the project to derail China’s Belt and Road Initiative, aka the 21st-century Silk Road which poses a threat to neoliberal control of markets and the global economy. We are witnessing this being tested in the South China Sea and the China-Indochina Corridor as the US engages in provocative behavior against the Chinese navy.

Most believe we live in a democracy when in fact we live under a soft corporate-banker fascist police and surveillance state. I say “soft” because in the United States the government has mastered the art of control through media, not simply the corporate media, but also woven through the products of an entertainment industry that collaborates with the Pentagon and the CIA.

The state has done this for a very long time in America—from the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798 to the FBI’s COINTELPRO and beyond. Technology has given the state the ability to covertly destroy its political enemies, whereas previously it took a lot of footwork.

Admittedly, this isn’t in-your-face like China’s social credit system, but the end result approaches what China is after—total control of the population and the removal of all serious political opponents challenging the state’s hegemonic rule.

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