



# Liberty Tree

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By Dick Greb

**T**echnology is advancing by leaps and bounds; what was cutting-edge yesterday is commonplace tomorrow.

My first personal computer, which was faster and had more memory than most others of its day, would be vastly out-computed by the lowliest 'smart' phone now available. And that phone, in turn, will be considered obsolete within a few years, if not months.

But technology's advance is, in many ways, a two-edged sword. What at first glance seems liberating often turns out to be just the opposite. Cell phones let you connect to friends, family, and even the internet from just about anywhere, but with that convenience comes a level of tracking of your whereabouts that should give any freedom-loving person nightmares. And that's only the beginning of the intrusion into our personal affairs.

As Edward Snowden revealed, the government is monitoring all of our electronic communications — our phone calls, texts, emails, internet browsing histories, etc. And this extreme infringement of privacy is not

## NO SAFE SPACE

*from government spies*

restricted to foreign terrorists who "hate us for our freedoms," nor even to more common criminals. No, this surveillance is targeting each and every one of us, from all walks of

life. That means you, your spouse, your sons and daughters, everyone you know, everyone you see on the street or on television or read about in the newspapers. It's hard to really wrap your mind around the enormity of this invasion of our privacy.

Some people may still envision wire-tapping methods seen on old police-drama TV series, where a couple of cops sitting in a decoy truck listen on headphones and record phone conversations on a reel-to-reel tape deck. Such people would consider it ridiculous to think that the government would go to that much trouble to listen to the ordinary phone calls of ordinary people like themselves.

But the technologies that enable our current levels of surveillance are far beyond such antiquated methods. Conversations are not monitored by live operators, but they are recorded and monitored by computers in real time. Computers can "listen" for key words and phrases (e.g., "bombing" or "assassination"<sup>1</sup>) and flag those recordings to be reviewed by live operators. Even if nobody listens to them at that time, the recordings can be, and undoubtedly are, kept indefinitely, giving the government spies the ability to go back after the fact, and listen in on any conversation you had with any person. The storage capacity for this undertaking is understandably huge, but money is no object to the government spy network, which builds mega-data storage centers like the one in Utah to house the necessary memory banks. The energy just to operate the Utah center is estimated to cost \$40 million a year.

### Is your TV watching you?

**R**ecent leaks reveal that the CIA (and no doubt the NSA, and just about every other alphabet agency)

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1. Such phrases are likely to be changed as circumstances change.

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is hacking into pretty much every system and device in use today, even turning television sets into spying apparatuses, allowing them to keep tabs on what you discuss in your home. Cameras and speakers in computers and phones can be activated remotely so that you can be monitored even when you're not using the devices. Such unconstitutional invasions of your private affairs are not just the result of government exploiting known vulnerabilities (although certainly they do), but also the result of capabilities purposely built into the devices by the manufacturers, who work hand-in-glove with the criminals in government to facilitate the spying. In other words, mega-corporations not only passively refrain from fixing vulnerabilities in their equipment, they also actively create the mechanisms by which the information theft can be accomplished. Because they want your information, too!

Like big government, big corporations understand that information is power. So, they are also collecting as much information about you as they possibly can. Methods like credit and debit cards, grocery store cards, and members-only discount stores are so ubiquitous that many people don't give them a second thought (or even a first one). Another common practice in many stores is to request your phone number, which links you into other databases. All these methods enable fairly extensive dossiers to be assembled about you and your habits. And, whether they are using it to specifically target you for ads and promotions, or selling it to others (including the government), they have a financial interest in knowing as much about you as they possibly can.

### If you haven't done anything wrong ...

There is no longer any question that this surveillance is ongoing, and the government is amassing vast amounts of information about each and every one of us. Even so, you may be told, "If you haven't done anything wrong, then what have you got to hide?" Well, in response, you may want to start with the fact that there are so many laws, regulations, ordinances, etc., that you can never really be sure that you are in compliance with all of them at any time. The Library of Congress website posts the following comment about the difficulty of compliance:

In an example of a failed attempt to tally up the number of laws on a specific subject area, in 1982 the Justice

The completely unconstitutional National Security Agency has a massive complex of concrete buildings in Bluffdale, Utah, completed at a reported cost of \$1.5 billion and housing row upon row of servers to store information gathered from phone calls and internet traffic, likely from intercept points placed at communication corporations.

Department tried to determine the total number of criminal laws. In a project that lasted two years, the Department compiled a list of **approximately 3,000 criminal offenses**. This effort, headed by Ronald Gainer, a Justice Department official, is considered the **most exhaustive attempt to count the number of federal criminal laws**. ... Mr. Gainer characterized this fruitless project: "[y]ou will have died and [been] resurrected three times," and still not have an answer to this question.<sup>2</sup>

So, while it may not be true that each of us is committing three felonies a day as suggested by the title of Harvey Silverglate's 2011 book,<sup>3</sup> it is a virtual certainty that we all have violated some federal, state or municipal 'law' at some time within its statute of limitations. Thus, every one of us could be targeted any time the government takes an interest in us.

But wait, there's more! As Edward Snowden correctly acknowledged in his June 9, 2013 interview with Amy Davidson of *The New Yorker*:

It's getting to the point, you don't have to have done anything wrong. You simply have to eventually fall under suspicion from somebody, even by a wrong call, and then they could use this system to go back in time and scrutinize every decision you've ever made, every friend you've ever discussed something with, and attack you on that basis, to sort of derive suspicion from an innocent life and paint anyone in the context of a wrongdoer.<sup>4</sup>

With the ability to go back in time and examine so many recorded details of our daily lives, government agents will have ample opportunities to dig up something to use against us. Imagine trying to prove, years after the fact, that you didn't visit some website *now* claimed to be "terrorism-related," or send some email that makes threatening statements against government officials, or conspire with others over the phone to commit treason. And that's ignoring the fact that government officials are not above *manufacturing evidence*



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whenever it suits their purpose, as should be obvious to anyone whose head isn't stuck in the sand. Audio recordings are especially dangerous in this regard, because with all of your phone calls available to them, skillful operators could cut and paste them to make it appear as if you said almost anything they want.<sup>5</sup>

### Blackmail, anyone?

The point here isn't so much that the government is looking for a way to lock us all up, but that this all-pervasive surveillance gives it leverage over anybody it takes an interest in at any time it chooses. As a matter of fact, the threat of criminal charges might not even be necessary to accomplish its goals. For leverage purposes, it might be enough to discover merely embarrassing situations, or things that would disrupt the target's present life. For example, evidence of an extra-marital affair of a pillar of the community might be all that's necessary to persuade him to take some desired action. One such example of the possible consequences of one's dirty laundry being made public is General David Petraeus, who, after the revelation of his affair with Paula Broadwell, resigned as Director of the CIA. Although Petraeus' resignation may not have been the result of government spying, it still illustrates a few important points.

First, public knowledge of his affair was enough to induce him to take an action that he would not likely have otherwise taken. High-ranking officials and corporate executive types, recognizing the damage that such revelations can bring, would make likely candidates for blackmail or extortion, lest their sins be likewise revealed. Second, even though he was Director of the CIA, his emails were not immune from scrutiny. And if his are not, then certainly neither are those of members of Congress, and the judiciary, and other ex-

**“ ... you don't have to have done anything wrong. You simply have to eventually fall under suspicion ... and then they could use this system to ... scrutinize every decision you've ever made, every friend you've ever discussed something with, and attack you on that basis, ... ”**

ecutive officers. The personal communications of all of those people undoubtedly reveal mountains of improprieties, if not outright criminal behavior. Again, this makes all of them susceptible to manipulation through blackmail. This aspect, all by itself, is simply staggering in its opportunities for corruption. And don't forget, those who are involved in the collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination of this ocean of potential blackmail fodder are also being surveilled, and so they, in turn, are subject to the same pressures of being blackmailed.

### Insider trading: lucrative sideline?

According to the Security and Exchange Commission's website:

Illegal insider trading refers generally to buying or selling a security, in breach of a fiduciary duty or other relationship of trust and confidence, while in possession of material, nonpublic information about the security.

Corporate executives naturally must know about major changes in the financial situation of their corporations before the general public does. They must make decisions that will affect all aspects of the business: the opening or closing of stores or manufacturing plants; the introduction of new products; stock splits or buy-backs or other capital manipulations; and many other day-to-day decisions that will affect the price of their publicly traded stock. When such executives use that knowledge before it's made public to personally benefit from the resulting moves in the price of the company's stock, it's considered "insider trading." Such insider trading can also result from "tipping," when the execs pass along the information to others who use it to make trades.

But how about when the tipping occurs as a result of government spies surveilling all communications of every executive of every corporation? Certainly, much of the wrangling that naturally occurs before major financial moves are made is done over the phone, or by email, or even in the presence of phones or computers. This means that all that insider information will be known by anyone with access to the surveillance data, often long before such decisions are made public. The pressure to act on such inside information is significant, and

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2. Emphasis added; <https://blogs.loc.gov/law/2013/03/frequent-reference-question-how-many-federal-laws-are-there/>
3. *Three Felonies A Day: How the Feds Target the Innocent.*
4. <http://www.newyorker.com/news/amy-davidson/edward-snowden-the-n-s-a-leaker-comes-forward>
5. Not to mention technology which can simply use your voice print to make any words sound like you said them.

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many will succumb to the lure of easy money, especially since the source of their “tips” will be virtually impossible to trace. There’s even the possibility of manipulating stock prices by “leaking” information at opportune times. And unlike the corporate bigwigs themselves, who only have inside information about their own companies, those with access to the surveillance data have it about *every* corporation! They could pick and choose, taking a little here and a little there, and thus minimize the chance that they will be caught while raking in fortunes. This is also a rather handy way for the CIA to supplement the income from its drug trafficking operations, as a way to fund its “black operations.”

### CAFRs: follow the money

**B**ack around the turn of the century, Walter Burien brought Combined Annual Financial Reports to the attention of the public. These CAFRs are financial statements generated by every level of government, from federal to municipal. His investigation into these reports led him to the discovery that the government has multitudes of funds under its control, which carry significant balances from year to year. In other words, government is stockpiling money that it has taken from you and sitting on it.

Well, not quite sitting on it, because much of the money in these funds is actually invested in the stock markets. This means that the government owns millions of shares of publicly traded corporations. And this means it is part owner of those corporations. As I wrote about in the February 2010 *Liberty Tree*,<sup>6</sup> the State of New York’s pension fund owned 1,619,920 shares of Sanofi-Aventis, a vaccine manufacturer, worth \$153,887,891. At the same time, New York was attempting to force all health care workers to get vaccinated, a clear conflict of interest.

The importance of this can hardly be overstated. Governments at all levels own billions (actually, probably trillions) of dollars of the stock of publicly traded corporations. Taken as a whole, it



**Orwell’s 1984 vision is closer than ever before. People today are just unaware that their modern tools spy on them.**

probably owns controlling interest in some of them. This looks a lot like the explanation of fascism found in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Economics*:

Where socialism sought totalitarian control of a society’s economic processes through direct state operation of the means of production, fascism sought that control indirectly, through domination of nominally private owners. Where socialism nationalized property explicitly, fascism did so implicitly, by requiring owners to use their property in the “national interest”—that is, as the autocratic authority conceived it. (Nevertheless, a few industries were operated by the state.) Where socialism abolished all market relations outright, fascism left the appearance of market relations while planning all economic activities.<sup>7</sup>

On top of this, the government not only has access to insider information about the corporations it owns stock in, but also their competitors. Using that information, it can manipulate stock prices in its favor day after day, year after year, to accumulate even more stock in even more corporations. Taken to the extreme, this could continue until government owns it all, or at least controlling interest of it all, even while it appears that the underlying businesses are still “public” corporations.

To top it all off, the ability to blackmail legislators, judges, executive branch officers, and anybody else necessary to implement the nefarious plans of these government criminals, guarantees that laws will continue to be enacted, enforced and interpreted in exactly the ways that enable the continuance and expansion of the control grid intended for the common folk. The amount of corruption and subversion of our Constitutional republic that this universal surveillance will heap upon us is monumental. We are getting ever closer to George Or-

well’s picture of the future in his novel *1984*. And the picture of that future was described by O’Brien as “imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever.”



6. See “Are you being served?” [http://libertyworksradionetwork.com/jml/images/pdfs/libtree\\_feb\\_2010.pdf](http://libertyworksradionetwork.com/jml/images/pdfs/libtree_feb_2010.pdf)

7. <http://www.econlib.org/library/Enc/Fascism.html>