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New Report: "Recording Everything" Details How Governments Can Shape The Dynamics Of Dissent

DECEMBER 29, 2011



"Recording Everything" PDF



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Brandon Turbeville

Activist Post

A recent Brookings Institution report has now confirmed what many have suspected for some time – that the United States government (and virtually every other government in the world) has the capability to **monitor and record** nearly every interaction that occurs within its national borders.

For years, those individuals who have tried to warn others of the creeping surveillance state were met with enials and catcalls of “conspiracy theory,” as well as the famous claims that it was not physically possible to monitor everyone.

his new report, however, shatters the delusional rationalities of the uninformed into a million pieces.

he Brookings Institution report entitled, “**Recording everything: Digital Storage as an Enabler of Authoritarian Governments**” (.pdf) discusses the increasing capacities for surveillance due to the improvement in technology and the sinking costs of its procurement, along with the implications for human rights and authoritarianism that come along with it.

The report begins by stating:

Within the next few years an important threshold will be crossed: For the first time ever, it will become technologically and financially feasible for authoritarian governments to record nearly everything that is said or done within their borders – every phone conversation, electronic message, social media interaction, the movements of nearly every person and vehicle, and video from every street corner. Governments with a history of using all of the tools at their disposal to track and monitor their citizens will undoubtedly make full use of this capability once it becomes available.

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Although the study suggests that governments will make use of this technology “once it becomes available,” anyone who has done even cursory research into the technological and intelligence capabilities of major governments is aware that, when technologies are announced to the general public, the actual capabilities of these governments to harness that technology are light years ahead of what is being announced. Indeed, the technology itself is almost always already obsolete before it’s theoretical presentation is even offered up for digestion by the mass population.

175 It is also interesting to note that John Villasenor, the author of the study, makes continual reference to the world’s remaining authoritarian regimes,” specifically those of Syria, Iran, Burma, and China, but completely leaves out those of the United States, Australia, Israel, and Great Britain to name a few. This is no doubt an intentional propaganda move. However, the reader should not dismiss reality in the same manner as Villasenor.

Obviously, Villasenor and the Brookings Institution know full well that the United States and virtually the entire Western World has become an authoritarian surveillance society, yet the Western nations are left out of the description due to the fact that the report functions more as a promotion of the technology than a warning. The Brookings report is an introduction flyer to the professorial, foundational, and cultural working class (those individuals who gradually implement the totalitarian system consciously, but often unconsciously as well). In this sense, the report is clearly not a study.

It is for this reason that the report focuses on oppressive governments in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia. But it is also because these nations are to be the next target of direct military action by the Anglo-American empire. The Libyan tragedy is referenced repeatedly in the report, but only in the context of Ghaddafi’s surveillance capabilities within his own country.



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Without seeking to reinforce the **lies told about the Ghaddafi regime** or the **status of the Libyan people** over the **last year**, it is nevertheless interesting to mention the surveillance capabilities of the regime as they are summed up by the Brookings report. Villasenor cites a **Wall Street Journal article** that claims Ghaddafi's intelligence agencies were able to "capture and archive "30 to 40 million minutes of telephone conversations every month and to regularly read emails exchanged among activists." All of this by a regime that was relatively weak, particularly in its ability to stave off an outside invasion of NATO bombing and **foreign intelligence subversion** conducted by much more sophisticated nations.

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Villasenor goes on to say, "The Ghadaffi regime was unusual among dictatorships only in that its internal spying activities were so thoroughly unmasked, not that they were occurring." This much is true.

However, the reader must turn his reasoning back toward his own country and ask, If a weak Ghaddafi regime was capable of so much surveillance of its own people, and if these types of spying activities are commonplace amongst governments, would it not stand to reason that the United States government, which is light years more advanced than the Libyan one, can and is conducting surveillance against its own citizens as well? Not only that, since the capabilities of the U.S. government are so much more than that of Ghadaffi and Ghadaffi-like regimes, it would also stand to reason that U.S. government surveillance is being conducted at immensely more sophisticated levels. The same goes for any Western nation.

If the Libyan government is unique only in that its surveillance has been unmasked, what then of the **Bush-era domestic surveillance program** or the

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openness of the American government in **monitoring Twitter feeds, social networking sites**, or even the legal declarations of surveillance carried in the **PATRIOT Act**, the **Telecommunications Act**, and **Patriot Act 2**? These programs have not been unmasked. They are freely admitted. Is it even imaginable, then, the true capabilities that exist in the recesses of the military and intelligence communities in our own nation?

Although Villasenor limits his discussion to the **next targets of the Anglo-American empire**, his statements are easily transposed to apply to those **175** ations who currently have such capabilities and who ave already implemented them under the cover of opular acceptance and “democratic” methods — eaning, simply, the lack of resistance from the eneral public by virtue of their lack of knowledge or heir lack of concern.

Villasenor writes:

... the evolving role of digital storage in facilitating truly pervasive surveillance is widely recognized. Plummeting digital storage costs will soon make it possible for authoritarian regimes to not only monitor known dissidents, but also to store the complete set of digital data associated with everyone within their borders. These enormous databases of captured information will create what amounts to a surveillance time machine, enabling state security services to retroactively eavesdrop on people in the months and years before they were designated as surveillance targets. This will fundamentally change the dynamics of dissent, insurgency, and revolution.

That is, if the information isn't already available publicly on the “revolutionaries” Facebook page. Indeed, something similar has already been **used in England** after the bizarre riots that overtook the country months ago. Facial recognition software was

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able to identify (or so it was claimed) many of the rioters who were arrested after the riots had subsided.

However, what Villasenor is describing is the ability to build detailed digital dossiers on individuals, full of incriminating evidence gleaned through everyday, normal, social interactions, that can be called on at any minute to build a case against an individual for daring to question the State. All of it, of course, will be there. The angry Facebook post made in a fit of rage against the government; the email to Monsanto that seems "threatening;" or the telephone conversation where one procured an illegal substance for a weekend of fun.

But the question still remains for some, "How would it be possible to monitor and store so much information?"

Villasenor provides some interesting analysis in regards to the declining costs of storage technology and also the increase in the capability of that technology. In terms of cost, he writes:

Over the past three decades, storage costs have declined by a factor of 10 approximately every 4 years, reducing the per-gigabyte cost from approximately \$85,000 (in 2011 dollars) in mid-1984 to about five cents today. In other words, storage costs have dropped by a factor of well over one million since 1984. Not surprisingly, that fundamentally changes the scale of what can be stored.

In terms of storage capability, the analysis is quite shocking, especially to those who may have doubted the technological advancements available to major governments, militaries, and intelligence agencies. Villasenor writes:

So what, exactly would it take to store everything? The answer depends in part on the nature of the information. Location data is far less voluminous than



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audio from phone calls, which in turn requires much less storage than video.

Location data, which is readily obtained from mobile phones, Wi-Fi connections, and GPS receivers, can already easily be archived. It takes fewer than 75 bits (ones and zeros) to pinpoint a person's location anywhere on the earth to an accuracy of about 15 feet. The information identifying the location of each of one million people to that accuracy at five-minute intervals, 24 hours a day for a full year could easily be stored in 1,000 gigabytes, which would cost slightly over \$50 at today's prices. For 50 million people, the cost would be under \$3,000.

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The audio for all of the telephone calls made by a single person over the course of one year could be stored using roughly 3.3 gigabytes. On a per capita basis, the cost to store all phone calls will fall from about 17 cents per person per year today to under 2 cents in 2015.

The current prices of such technology, much less the projected prices a few years from now, are shockingly low considering the scale of surveillance that would be, and probably is, taking place. Given the figures above, if the United States population is 300 million, the cost of storing the location data of everyone in the country for a year would be approximately the cost of a low-wage job, around \$18,000. This is hardly a large sum of money for any government.

Ignoring, for a moment, Villasenor's obvious bias against Syria and Iran, his estimate surrounding the costs of these governments' surveillance programs are

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somewhat revealing if for nothing else than their relation to our own government's ability and potential to implement the same type of program.

He continues:

For a country like Syria, which has a population of 15 million people over the age of 14, the current cost to purchase storage sufficient to hold one year's worth of phone calls for the entire country would be about \$2.5 million – a high number but certainly not beyond governmental reach. If historical cost trends continue, the annual cost in 2011 dollars to purchase enough storage for Syria's government to record all calls made in that country will fall to about \$250,000 by 2016 and to about \$25,000 by 2020. Iran has an over-age-14 population of 59 million, so the corresponding cost to the Iranian government to record all calls in Iran would be about four times higher than in Syria. Cost will soon be no object for internal security services wishing to store everything said on a telephone in Syria, Iran, or even in a much more populous nation such as China.

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Or the United States, one might add. Or Great Britain. Or Australia . . . add your country of choice here. By now, you should be getting the point.

In regards to video surveillance, Villasenor's predictions are not much different after taking into account the difference in the type of surveillance data being absorbed and retained.

The report states:

By 2020 the cost to store, in high resolution, all of the video acquired by the Chongqing network [Chinese surveillance that equals one camera for every 24 people in an area of 12 million] will drop

to a much more practical \$3 million per year. On a per capita basis this corresponds to about 25 cents per person per year, an amount that can easily be budgeted or even extracted from the population being monitored through a euphemistically worded 'public safety tax.'

Keep in mind, the costs presented here are those to which the public would be subjected if they were to engage these systems in the marketplace, which, of course, they will not be doing. These figures are, essentially, mark-up value. They do not take into account where these surveillance technologies were originally developed, such as institutions within the government, military, and intelligence communities themselves which would, by definition, give governments cheaper and greater access to them.

ARPA immediately comes to mind in the context of this discussion. Such an agency is full of money black holes, black budgets, and secret projects that not only would aid in the development of such technology, but also its implementation without the knowledge of the citizenry. Such has been the case many times before. Must the **national collection of blood at birth** be mentioned again in order to jog the reader's memory?

The implications for stifling dissent need not be summed up at this point in this article. It is fairly obvious that such broad and far-reaching surveillance would necessarily significantly damage the ability of the general public to resist, be it planned or out-of-the-blue, any form of tyranny the regime wishes to place upon them.

Nevertheless, consider the report's extensive comments on the effects that such surveillance would have on dissent, revolution, and "insurgency."

But the ability to record everything will tilt the playing field back in favor of repressive governments by laying the

foundation for a plethora of new approaches to targeting dissent. When all of the telephone calls in an entire country can be captured and provided to voice recognition software programmed to extract key phrases, and when video footage from public spaces can be correlated in real time to the conversations, text messages, and social media traffic associated with the people occupying those spaces, the arsenal of responses available to a regime facing dissent will expand. Some changes will be immediate and tactical. Instead of implementing broad social media or Internet shutdowns in response to unrest, governments in possession of complete communications databases will be able to conduct more selective censorship or alteration of message traffic during periods of instability. This will provide a great capability to shape or quell dissent.

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The report also mentions the ability to go back in time and build a detailed case against the dissenter, even if the evidence compiled is somewhat circumstantial.

Pervasive monitoring will provide what amounts to a time machine allowing authoritarian governments to perform retrospective surveillance. For example, if an anti-regime demonstrator previously unknown to security services is arrested, it will be possible to go back in time to scrutinize the demonstrator's phone conversations, automobile travels, and the people he or she met in the months and even years leading up to the arrest.

Villasenor correctly asserts that the implementation of such open surveillance will have a chilling effect on activism and dissent. This goes without saying since activists and dissenters are now aware that anything they say is being listened to and recorded for purposes

of prosecution.

Thus, the report reads:

There are also longer-term consequences that include a thinning of the ranks of regime opponents. By definition, organized dissent requires that dissenters have the ability to exchange information. Prominent opponents of repressive governments have learned to expect tracking of their movements and interception of their phone calls and other forms of electronic communications. But when technology enables an entire country's worth of communications to be intercepted, the circle of people whom dissidents will be able to recruit to their ranks will narrow.

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In addition, knowledge that communications are archived will reduce the willingness of dissidents to speak frankly even over encrypted communications. . . . Awareness of the likelihood that all messages – including those that are encrypted – will eventually be read by security services will chill dissent.

No doubt, in light of this new Brookings Institution report, along with other means of surveillance such as **palm scans**, **vein scans**, iris scans, **voice** and **facial recognition** as well as **emotion detectors**, we are entering an era in which dissent will truly require an individual to make a decision whether or not his principles are worth his freedom or even his life.

We, as American citizens — or any other citizen for that matter — must make our voices heard and our presence felt while we still can. It is up to us whether or not the Brave New World we enter into will be marked by courage and consciousness, or the grip of a scientific dictatorship.

Brandon Turbeville is an author out of Mullins, South Carolina. He has a Bachelor's Degree from Francis Marion University where he earned the Pee Dee Electric Scholar's Award as an undergraduate. He has had numerous articles published dealing with a wide variety of subjects including health, economics, and civil liberties. He also the author of [Codex Alimentarius – The End of Health Freedom](#), [7 Real Conspiracies](#) and [Five Sense Solutions](#). Brandon Turbeville is available for podcast, radio, and TV interviews. Please contact us at [activistpost \(at\) gmail.com](mailto:activistpost@gmail.com).

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Mike · 4 years ago

It has been long known the EVERY electronic
communicate in North America is filtered through the
NSA's supercomputer language programs before they
reach their intended recipient. People who balk at the
idea are just exposing their level of ignorance on the
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Anonymous · 4 years ago

Come on folks - the hackocracy has skills that make
the .gov side look like a bunch of mongoloid spastics
on Ritalin.

If it ever genuinely looked like shit was going to get
real, a half-decent team of hackers (like the guys who
dropped StratFor off the internet a week ago) would
find the server (.gov is all about centralising - and too
stupid to employ decent countermeasures), and wipe
it clean.

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Anonymous · 4 years ago

It would only take one major solar flare to shut down
the snoops and spooks -- unless they spend multi-
millions more to shield their electronics. If ever there
was a time for the sun to burp a big one, it is right
now. A damaged electrical grid, of course, would be
extremely tough on all of us for awhile but if it got the
bugs out of our bedding it might be worth the
hardship. And to all you surveillancecrats and
enforcers -- do you really think your fellow perverts
will not apply the technology against you too? Here's
a suggestion -- sabotage the system before you and
your family are sacrificed on the altar of the



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