# Washington Post details vast growth of US domestic spying

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The *Washington Post* published Monday the second installment of an investigation into the enormous scale of the US domestic intelligence apparatus built up since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The article brings together valuable information about the police buildup, presented in both written and graphical form, including an interactive web-based map. (See: http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/monitoring-america/)

While authorized and funded in the guise of a response to terrorism, the network of agencies at the federal, state and local levels represents an enormous threat to the democratic rights of the American people. It is the scaffolding for the construction of a police state.

The *Post* survey is well worth careful examination, along with the first article in the series, which profiles the Department of Homeland Security and other federal agencies devoted to domestic spying. (See: http://projects.washingtonpost.com/top-secret-america/articles/a-hidden-world-growing-beyond-control/)

Some of the most important revelations include the following:

• The federal government is carrying out the collection and integration of personal information on hundreds of thousands, and eventually millions, of Americans, most of whom have committed no criminal offense and are certainly not engaged in anything that could reasonably be considered "terrorism."

• A total of 4,058 federal, state and local organizations now have "counterterrorism" functions, with one quarter of these either newly created since 9/11 or involved in counterterrorist activities for the first time since then.

• US police agencies are deploying technologies tested on the battlefields of Iraq and Afghanistan and using them to monitor and target American citizens.

• State and local police agencies are monitoring legal political activities, including protests over environmental, immigration and other issues, and filing reports with counterterrorism "fusion centers" in the 50 states.

• The Obama administration is spearheading the expansion of domestic counterterrorism well beyond the level carried out under the Bush administration. In 2010 alone, the Department of Homeland Security provided $3.8 billion in counterterrorism grants to state and local agencies.

Uses of military technology include biometric facial recognition equipment, now used in Maricopa County, Arizona (Phoenix) to record 9,000 digital mug shots each month, as well as the use of Predator drones along both the Mexican and Canadian borders.

In one of the most chilling passages, the *Post* notes: "The special operations units deployed overseas to kill the al-Qaeda leadership drove technological advances that are now expanding in use across the United States." In other words, the same methods used by military and CIA hunter-killer squads in the mountains of Afghanistan are being transferred to domestic policing operations inside the United States.

The *Post* gives a picture of what the integration of military technology and law enforcement, as well as local, state and federal information databases, means in a typical American city, Memphis, Tennessee.

Memphis police now use hand-held, wireless fingerprint scanners, first developed for US troops patrolling insurgent neighborhoods in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities, to provide instant ID checks on anyone detained by police. These scanners allow police to "instantly call up a mug shot, a Social Security number, the status of the driver's license and any outstanding warrants."

Many police cars are equipped with military-grade infrared cameras that move robotically, taking digital images of every license plate in view and checking each one against various databases, alerting the police when there is a "hit" on a driver with an outstanding warrant.

The Department of Homeland Security helped the city buy surveillance cameras that are posted near housing projects, busy street corners, bridges and other "sensitive" locations. Data mining technology allows police to rapidly cross-reference biometric data, driver's licenses and license plates and credit card information.

This has been supplemented through the collaboration of private corporations with the government. The Memphis police "persuaded the local utility company" to provide "a daily update of the names and addresses of customers," so that police executing warrants would have a better chance of finding those they were seeking.

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All the data accumulated through these operations is uploaded automatically to the Memphis Real Time Crime Center, "a command center with three walls of streaming surveillance video and analysis capabilities that rival those of an Army command center," according to the *Post*. The data is "geocoded" to produce what are in effect police battle maps for the city.

The data is further uploaded to the FBI's central data campus in Clarksburg, West Virginia, where it is integrated into the existing store of fingerprints, now approaching 100 million, and including data collected from US military prisoners in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as countries like Saudi Arabia and Yemen, which collaborate extensively with US counterterrorism operations.

This year, for the first time, according to a federal spokeswoman, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense are able to share fingerprint records. This means that the line between domestic policing and military action has been effectively erased.

The goal of a new Obama administration operation, called the Nationwide Suspicious Activity Reporting Initiative, or SAR, is for every local police department in the United States to have its data files integrated with the FBI's, in a gigantic central database on a large proportion of the American population.

The definition of what is suspicious activity—"observed behavior reasonably indicative of pre-operational planning related to terrorism or other criminal activity"—is so broad as to cover virtually any activity that arouses police interest, no matter how innocent.

The *Post* gave an example of how an SAR file would be generated by a local cop seeing "a suspicious subject" taking a photograph of an Orange County, California ferry boat with his cell phone camera, even though the individual was later joined by two other adults and two small children, and all of them boarded the ferry for what was obviously a pleasure trip.

This report would be uploaded to the Los Angeles fusion center, one of 60 or so regional facilities established with funds from the DHS to collect and integrate information. From there, it could be forwarded to the FBI for further investigation, or for storage for a period as long as five years, the *Post* noted, "during which time many other pieces of information about the man photographing a boat on a Sunday morning could be added to his file: employment, financial and residential histories; multiple phone numbers; audio files; video from the dashboard-mounted camera in the police cruiser at the harbor where he took pictures; and anything else in government or commercial databases 'that adds value,' as the FBI agent in charge of the database described it."

The Pentagon has access to this classified database, known as the Guardian system, which had 161,948 suspicious activity files as of this month. There is also an unclassified section of the database, to which state and local police contribute data and have access.

The entire structure *Post* detailed account the ominous political implications, since it is quite clear, although the newspaper is careful not to say so, that information on political opposition to US government policies, particularly from the left, is being incorporated into these databases. While a handful of individual "infractions" have been exposed, as recently in Pennsylvania , this can only be considered the tip of the iceberg.

In addition to the vast increase in data collection and integration, there is the rightwing and antidemocratic character of the personnel charged with running the entire system. The *Post* account treats this as an aberration, or perhaps an excess, describing the vitriolic anti-Muslim racism of many of those engaged in providing "training" in terrorism for local and state government agencies.

Former military operatives now engaged in training routinely describe all Muslims in the United States as potential enemies who want to impose sharia law on the United States and forcibly convert the entire population to Islam. They advise infiltration of mosques and Muslim student groups and systemic phone tapping in the Muslim community.

Perhaps most important from a political standpoint is the leading role played by Obama administration officials like Janet Napolitano, former governor of Arizona, now secretary of the Department of Homeland Security. Napolitano has publicly enlisted Wal-Mart, Amtrak, the major sports leagues and hotel chains in a campaign to promote reporting "suspicious activity" and generating "terror tips."

The *Post* notes, "In her speeches she compares the undertaking to the Cold War fight against communists." Precisely: the Obama administration is embracing a form of McCarthyism, with "terrorism" supplanting the "Red menace" as the object of demonization.

The virtue of this approach, from the standpoint of the American ruling class, is that any form of domestic social upheaval—strikes, sit-ins, mass demonstrations against war, struggles against eviction, foreclosure and utility shutoff—can be branded "terrorism" and those engaged in it targeted for police repression.

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