

# The **NO-NONSENSE GUIDE** to **GLOBAL SURVEILLANCE**

‘Publishers have created lists of short books that discuss the questions that your average [electoral] candidate will only ever touch if armed with a slogan and a soundbite. Together [such books] hint at a resurgence of the grand educational tradition... Closest to the hot headline issues are *The No-Nonsense Guides*. These target those topics that a large army of voters care about, but that politicians evade. Arguments, figures and documents combine to prove that good journalism is far too important to be left to (most) journalists.’

Boyd Tonkin,  
*The Independent*,  
London

### About the author

Born in London, Robin Tudge has lived and worked in Moscow, Hanoi and Beijing, and as a journalist has written for scores of publications worldwide. His first book was the pioneering *Bradt Guide to North Korea* in 2003, then in 2005 he co-wrote the best-selling *Rough Guide to Conspiracy Theories*. A lifelong fascination with police states and surveillance became focused on the contemporary situation in 2006, when the British government legislated for UK citizens to start carrying ID cards. He is also an aspiring actor, living in Deptford, within sight of where the playwright and spy Kit Marlowe was cut down.

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# **GLOBAL SURVEILLANCE**

Robin Tudge

**New Internationalist**

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## Foreword

PRIVACY IS THE human right upon which many other rights rest. Privacy and free expression, the ability to live, think and voice one's thoughts freely: these are all inter-dependent concepts linked to the dignity of the individual. Yet the threat to privacy in the modern era has never been greater. Governments, corporations and cybercriminals are among others orchestrating the trans-border flow and harvesting of our personal data. They may be interested in combating terrorism and organized crime, in promoting interactivity and profiling for advertising, in perpetrating fraud or worse. But all work, both knowing and unknowingly, towards the ultimate marginalization of the most fragile right of privacy.

We at Privacy International believe that privacy forms part of the bedrock of freedoms. Since our organization was founded in 1990, our goal has always been to create protections and laws at national and international levels to preserve it. We have hundreds of leading experts in privacy and human rights from around the world, including computer professionals, academics, lawyers, journalists and human rights activists working globally to defend personal privacy against the ever-growing and morphing forms of privacy violations. Our team consists of libertarians and liberals, conservatives and progressives. We have worked in environments as diverse as refugee camps in eastern Africa to engineering hubs in Silicon Valley. We liaise with policy-makers and civil society in dozens of countries, as we work to promote strong safeguards that apply equally to international organizations and complex economies, to developing countries and emerging legal systems.

One of the more worrying developments we are seeing is just how difficult it is to monitor those who push surveillance technologies. In 1995 PI reviewed some 240 Western companies, some of them household

names, that since the 1970s had been selling surveillance technology to some of the most oppressive, murderous police and military states. This technology enabled the genocide in Rwanda, and allowed the South African apartheid regime to function as it did. The companies that supplied Guatemala's dictators knew what their products were going to be used for – the deathlist targets were on the tender documents. Many of these 240 companies have since begun to 'consult' with telecommunications companies, internet service providers, governments, lawmakers and regimes to build surveillance from the core, 'by design'. Meanwhile, many non-Western firms, notably from China, are beginning to move into the global surveillance industry and sell their wares for the enhancement of surveillance states worldwide.

The defense of privacy is not easy, but the fact that privacy has turned into an issue that is on the front pages of news and media sources worldwide is testament to the importance of the task. The reams of communiqués we receive daily, from public and parliaments alike, show how alive the issue of privacy is and how vital is its defense.

This well-written, forceful overview provides an excellent introduction to the history and contemporary issues of the world of surveillance and shows how we are all affected by its exponential growth – whether we want to be or not.

*Gus Hosein*

Senior Fellow, Privacy International

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# Introduction

A 2007 REPORT by international NGO Privacy International rated the world's states in terms of surveillance. It assessed how extensive or endemic was the surveillance and what workable safeguards in law defended the privacy of these spied-upon citizens. One might not be surprised to find China and Russia listed among the states with the most 'endemic' surveillance. But at this top table was also placed China's democratic brother and nemesis, Taiwan, those roaring capitalist outposts Malaysia and Thailand, and those bastions of democracy and freedom, the US, the UK and France.\*

Surveillance is essentially an over-arching means of accruing and sifting information. It is indispensable for an organization or entity of any complexity, from the village to the nation-state, from the corner shop to the transnational corporation, from the local church to the Vatican, to keep account – nothing can function without knowledge. As societies have grown more complex and individuals' interactions with the state and one another have become entrenched and deepened, the technology of surveillance has expanded to global proportions, from satellite-enabled Global Positioning Systems right down to the near-atomic level of one's DNA.

Endemic surveillance underpinned communist states and military dictatorships paranoid about stifling dissent – but, as a tool of accounting, surveillance runs throughout the capitalist and social-democratic states of the West as well. And while espionage, citizen monitoring and censorship have undoubtedly enabled the jackbooted to stamp their authority and extend their power, they have also been vital tools for opposing authoritarianism in war and defending 'freedom' in peace. This book is interested in surveillance in its civilian contexts, where it will often be seen that the military and intelligence services were the originators

\* See map on page 94

of some technique that was then developed for widespread use against civilians. Too often, and even with the best intentions, a surveillance system temporarily developed to defend freedom has become a permanent, embedded threat to human rights and democracy.

Surveillance is often a means of retaining and enhancing profit and power, whether on the part of an expansive empire or a desperate regime. Where once it was a means to an end it has now become an end in itself. The logarithms and artificial intelligence systems of computerized databases have gone from sifting the data so as to enable an outcome, to being trusted to direct that outcome. Surveillance is too often adapted from being an accounting tool to one that governments and corporations will use to direct and pre-empt.

The vast array of databases of information about individuals, be they state or private, social welfare or social networking, are usually set up to be siloed or self-contained, but are being rapidly shared and converged, mostly in unseen, unreported and unaccountable ways. This sharing is justified or sold to the citizen-consumer as being for their own good, their better security, their health, or even their fun. From Facebook via the ‘War on Terror’ to the war on plastic bags, the shrill voices of governments and marketing companies exhort us to hand over more data and allow it to be shared – though often we are not told what is happening until it’s too late. Information systems of unprecedented power and potential danger are being created, yet in a time of unprecedented global prosperity.

The road to Hell is paved with good intentions. Every new dollop of data allows government workers – confident in their own ability to run the system better – to adapt existing systems, to salvage something from the ruins of a costly, failed experiment, or to clear up the problems created by a previous ‘brilliant’ solution. Or just to accrue more power in the phenomenon known as ‘function creep’. In the private

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sector, money can't be made without the use of and then sale of data, which is 'just business, nothing personal'. Meanwhile, the key to profit, power and stable sexual relationships is seen to be loyalty and good behavior. How loyal are your customers and citizens? How faithful will they be in good times and bad? How far are they guided by their genes or their upbringing – and can enough data be accrued to predict and pre-empt their behavior?

Most brilliant new solutions involve a database of some kind, but data about the average Briton, for example, is on about 700 databases – and who could name even 10 of those databases? Concepts like consent and privacy are ground into dust by a thousand spinning hard-drives owned by public and private agencies whose interests and operating philosophy have converged.

Citizens, meanwhile, have become atomized within a globalized society. They are becoming less reliant on themselves or their communities than on a technology-based ether that demands every electron of their data just so that they can function. Every problem this creates demands another (profitable) techno-solution, and one which often involves yet more surveillance...

Step by step, a vast, utterly undemocratic enterprise is created, in which people are told they have 'nothing to hide, nothing to fear', but through which they are expected to stand naked before their watchers, in real time, for all time. Concepts like the presumption of innocence are binned – people are suspected until they can prove otherwise.

So surveillance goes from being a tool of accounting to one of calling to account, and God is replaced by Google.

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London