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Obama Administration Anti-Leak Scheme Shows Precrime and Total Information Awareness Go Hand In Hand

[During my appearance on *Real Time with Bill Maher* at the end of May](#), I raised an eyebrow or two by warning of creepy government policies aimed at achieving total information awareness (TIA) and, as I recall, fighting precrime. Shortly thereafter, Edward Snowden's many revelations — especially PRISM — revealed that TIA was all but here.

It became possible to write [essays explaining](#) how PRISM was merely “the most recent program in the state's continuous search for total knowledge capture.” Snowden's leaks were important not just because of what they contained, but because of what they represented — authoritative fact, as opposed to the trashy, easily-discredited theories of the conspiracy set. Snowden's information had become too mainstream for people not to be totally aware of it.



So I waited for the other shoe to drop — for information on Bush-Obama efforts at precrime to migrate from the swampy margins of American consciousness to the sunny uplands.

It's not taking long.

McClatchy — living up to its *Truth to Power* motto — has the goods on Obama's plan to fight the future's leakers. The headline tells us experts doubt it can work, since it hasn't been proven.

But that's not really the story. [This is the story:](#)

“ Under the program, which is being implemented with little public attention, security investigations can be launched when government employees showing “indicators of insider threat behavior” are reported by co-workers, according to previously undisclosed administration documents obtained by McClatchy. Investigations also can be triggered when

“suspicious user behavior” is detected by computer network monitoring and reported to “insider threat personnel.”

Federal employees and contractors are asked to pay particular attention to the lifestyles, attitudes and behaviors – like financial troubles, odd working hours or unexplained travel – of co-workers as a way to predict whether they might do “harm to the United States.” Managers of special insider threat offices will have “regular, timely, and, if possible, electronic, access” to employees’ personnel, payroll, disciplinary and “personal contact” files, as well as records of their use of classified and unclassified computer networks, polygraph results, travel reports and financial disclosure forms.

Over the years, numerous studies of public and private workers who’ve been caught spying, leaking classified information, stealing corporate secrets or engaging in sabotage have identified psychological profiles that could offer clues to possible threats. Administration officials want government workers trained to look for such indicators and report them so the next violation can be stopped before it happens.

For left-leaning writer David Sirota, training the attention of little brother on the intimate details of his fellow worker’s “lifestyles” and “attitudes” smacks of [McCarthyism](#). For me, I’m picking up Stalinist vibes. It’s not just the state’s effort to burrow into the spaces between humans that keep us human. It’s the effort to assert state control over all aspects of time in addition to space — not just the present, but the future, hoovering up the metaphorical breadcrumbs trailing back from what we will do and who we will be to what we’re doing and who we are.

Conspiracy theorists are often deservedly lampooned for getting mystical about the shadowy way power is exposed and hidden in the world. The administration’s own vision of security already supplies more than enough of a sense of the occult.

Not that precrime has been on government minds only since Obama took office. As [Christopher Ketcham noted years ago](#) [pdf], the use of artificial intelligence to predict the behavior of targeted persons was on the Bush administration’s agenda.

We can go far down the rabbit hole into the conspiracy swamps, here, but we won’t, because what matters most is to recognize the logical connection that makes TIA and precrime two peas in a conceptual pod. The idea is simple — to gain the best chance of knowing what could happen in the future, you should know as much as possible about the present. It’s just the premise of science in action: perfect our knowledge of the variables on the left side of the equals sign, and we’ll perfect our knowledge of what will wind up on the right side.

The particulars are incidental, in a way — they’re pretty much open secrets today, [and have been for years](#). There hasn’t been movement on new legislation that might curb the abuses Snowden revealed because we’re not going to transform the government away from precrime and TIA if we start from the question “What policy changes can solve or ameliorate this problem?” We have to start from conceptual frameworks. We have to start from what it is we want to bring into being by, to begin with, declaring it.

That’s why the Declaration of Independence is so important — yes, it’s a marvelous fusion of poetry, politics, and spiritualism, but it’s also a created reminder of where independence comes from. It comes from a declaration. And say what you will about [Texas Sen. Ted Cruz’s father Rafael, speaking here only partly in predictable zingers to a FreedomWorks crowd](#); the guy understands that only those who stake their declarations on their authentic integrity can expect their declarations to bring anything into being at all.

Rafael Cruz gives us a sobering twist on the famous line from *Braveheart* about how they can take our lives but never our freedom. Instead of our freedom, the elder Cruz says — implying that it's already on its way out — they can never take what made the Declaration possible: our “sacred honor.”

That's the standpoint from where we need to consider what it takes to rather literally take each other back from our government. (“Take our country back” is a line it's time to replace.) We are not a side of an equation. We are not an aggregate of inevitabilities. It's perhaps scary for many — especially those who do put faith in the healing power of policy — to think about approaching the practice of politics this way.

But is it scarier than the future our government has in store?

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