ENGR 482 Essay proposal

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Question: Is it ethical for engineers to work towards creating espionage products in the name of national security for intelligence agencies?

With increasing rates of data tracking and cyber security, it is critical that we take important steps in regulating products created in the name of security. Drones, security cameras, and other espionage products used by governmental & privatized intelligence agencies are a serious threat. With so much of our user data already being tracked through our phones, one can only imagine what's possible with advanced face tracking in the future.

While these products can be useful for our safety, it is also important to maintain privacy. We don't want to get to a situation where Intelligence agencies have all our day-to-day information and have video proof of it as well. The issue of engineers' involvement has been discussed extensively in an article in the Guardian named 'As engineers, we must consider the ethical implications of our work.'[1] The author is an engineer who describes the plight of engineers of technology used by agencies such as the NSA. Abbas El-Zein, the author discusses how engineers' focus mainly on creating products that fulfil their duty but lack a certain level of autonomy while working with the Government.

As engineers, it is our job to keep innovating and creating new products while, at the same time, being ethical and maintaining privacy for our customers. I'll first be exploring some specific case studies about how citizens felt that their rights were violated, and the outcomes of some acts of espionage. I'll be discussing how Kantian ethics, utilitarianism, and other ethical ideologies perceive this supposed intrusion of privacy. Another important aspect to explore is the risk versus benefits analysis of undertaking a project that spies on the public in an attempt to pinpoint potential threats to security.

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[1] El-Zein, Abbas. "As Engineers, We Must Consider the Ethical Implications of Our Work | Abbas El-Zein." The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 5 Dec. 2013, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/05/engineering-moral-effects-technology-impact.