



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 11, 2014

More DHS-funded Police Surveillance Cameras; No Drop in Crime

Thousands of surveillance cameras are showing up in cities across the country without a corresponding reduction in crime. Citizens are taking notice of this fact of the federal takeover of local police, and they are speaking out.

On January 8, for example, the Texas Civil Rights Project-Houston issued a statement [on its Facebook page](#) criticizing their city's participation in the construction of the surveillance state.



“As a community, we need to start a serious dialogue about the level of governmental intrusion in our daily lives that government foists upon us without our consent,” declared Amin Alehashem, the group's regional director. “Government has no need to know with whom we associate, walk on the streets, attend meetings, worship, or go to dinner.”

Local leaders in Houston, like those in so many other cities across the country, have approved the installation of new surveillance cameras. These 180 new cameras bring to nearly 1,000 the number of known surveillance cameras in the country's fourth largest city.

The eye of the government will reportedly cover the city's “public areas around downtown, stadiums and the theater district.”

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Local CBS affiliate [KHOU reports on its website](#) that Houston police chief Charles McClelland believes the city needs the nearly 1,000 cameras to “provide necessary police coverage.”

And just where did Houston get the money to buy these new cameras? There's [no provision for the expense in the mayor's Fiscal Year 2014 budget](#), so the city's not paying for these “critical” services so necessary for the “safety” of its citizens. Department of Homeland Security to the rescue!

In the article announcing the deployment of the new devices, KHOU reports, “The city has spent more than \$18 million in federal money to build its camera system and has another \$5 million in reserve.”

Perhaps citizens should overlook their elected leaders' acceptance of such federal largesse, given that the 900 or so surveillance cameras already in place have had such a favorable effect on crime rates in the city.

Not so much.

Again, from KHOU: “Officials say data is not kept to determine if the cameras are driving down crime.”

If the cameras aren't being used to reduce crime, just what are they being used for?

“We also know from experience and from recent events that the government will inevitably abuse its use of personal information attained by spying on us. Houston needs to re-think and reject this proposal,” Alehashem said in his press release.



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Precisely. These cameras — thousands upon thousands attached to poles and buildings from coast to coast — are not about crime reduction, but about liberty reduction.

Residents of Evanston, Illinois, seem to see the surveillance that way, too.

Over 100 citizens of this Chicago suburb have signed petitions requesting that the city council publicize all the information regarding a proposal to add “3.7 miles of surveillance cameras” along city streets.

Evanston’s plan to expand its surveillance capabilities has a couple of things in common with the Houston program.

First, there is the lack of evidence that the cameras make residents safer. Consider [this report published Wednesday in a local news blog](#):

Evanston resident Bobby Burns, who is collecting signatures online and in person in the neighborhood around the high school, told Patch he believes the city council does not have enough research to back up the surveillance camera proposal.

“If these cameras are really about student safety, there should be credible data that clearly supports the need,” he wrote in an e-mail. “If this is about youth homicides, protecting senior citizens, or keeping an eye on police [officers], let’s respect the importance of those issues and discuss them individually with care and consideration.”

So, just like the cameras in Houston, the cameras in Evanston (population 75,430) don’t seem to reduce crime or make anyone safer.

Another similarity between the two cases is found by following the money. The news blog Patch reports: “The cameras would be funded in part by a Homeland Security grant.”

There seems to be a pattern.

Cities aren’t buying just surveillance cameras with their Homeland Security grants, however.

In Bennington, Vermont, police were given an \$83,000 DHS grant to upgrade the department’s communication equipment.

Crime must be under control in Bennington, though, [as the Bennington Banner reports](#) that “a great deal of an officer’s time has been taken up by paperwork which is needed to secure grants.”

That’s an interesting addition to the story. Not only are the cameras not bringing down crime, but the police — whose job it is to fight crime — are too busy filling out federal grant forms to be out protecting and serving.

When they are patrolling the streets of their cities, however, cops these days look more like soldiers than police, thanks again to the buckets of cash dumped into coffers by Homeland Security.

In Frankfort, Kentucky, for example, 11 local law enforcement agencies are sharing almost \$60,000 in grant money — money they’re spending on body armor and weapons.

Other federal agencies are helping accelerate the arming of local police with military-grade materiel.

Police in Fort Pierce, Florida are now responding to calls in a “tank on wheels,” thanks to a new vehicle bought for next to nothing from the Pentagon.

Officer Keith Holmes applied for the vehicle grant and according to WPEC-TV in West Palm Beach, he believes this military tactical vehicle is necessary “due to the violence in the city we have here.”



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Crime is so bad in Fort Pierce that the police need armored vehicles? Even Officer Holmes admits that's a stretch.

"I agree to a certain extent it's overkill but for the cost, for \$2000, yes it's what we need." said Officer Holmes, as quoted on the WPEC website.

There's little doubt that if a police department has military weapons and vehicles, they'll find a way to use them, likely at the cost of citizens' civil liberties.

One story of local police being bought and turned into an outpost of the Department of Homeland Security reveals another disturbing element of the mass militarization of local law enforcement.

The [Ruidoso \(New Mexico\) News reports](#) that officers in the Ruidoso Downs Police Department will be "driving in style with a new fleet of 2014 Dodge Chargers."

By now, readers likely suspect the money to buy the cars came from DHS. It didn't, but there's still a tie to Homeland Security and the desire for DHS cash.

Ruidoso Downs Police Chief Chris Rupp believes his department will soon be able to join the list of DHS-funded forces because of the new cars. How so?

"Rupp said the new black and white colors on the vehicles will allow the department to be eligible for federal grants because the vehicles are Homeland Security Department compliant," the Ruidoso News reports.

Homeland Security compliant? That implies that local police are rewarded with more DHS money the more obedient they are to the federal agency's mandates. Yet another example of states willingly submitting to the federal government's decades-long program to obliterate state sovereignty and turn states into nothing more than administrative units of an all-powerful, all-seeing central authority.

Equally unsettling, however, is that for all the added surveillance and added firepower, crime is not going down.

The DHS grant program and the heavily subsidized Defense Department equipment/weapon sale may be designed to open a back door to the piecemeal mustering of a nationwide federal police force, composed of formerly local law enforcement officers.

Joe A. Wolverton, II, J.D. is a correspondent for The New American and travels frequently nationwide speaking on topics of nullification, the NDAA, the Second Amendment, and the surveillance state. He is the co-founder of Liberty Rising, an educational endeavor aimed at promoting and preserving the Constitution. Follow him on Twitter @TNAJoeWolverton and he can be reached at jwolverton@thenewamerican.com.



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