



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on April 24, 2014

IRS Claims Need to Track Taxpayer License Plates

Tired of the National Security Agency (NSA) listening to and recording your phone calls? Tired of them monitoring your social media posts? Tired of the Department of Homeland Security paying local police to install surveillance cameras capable of making citizens into suspects? Sadly, there's no time to rest, as several other federal agencies are jumping on the surveillance bandwagon.



Bloomberg reports that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Forest Service (among others) have awarded nearly half a million dollars to Vigilant Solutions, a California-based company that provides tools for tracking license plates and for accessing license plate databases.

Why would the IRS and the Forest Service need the technology to track the license plates of Americans? *Bloomberg* explains:

“The IRS uses a variety of investigative tools similar to other law-enforcement agencies to assist with criminal cases,” Eric Smith, an agency spokesman, said in an e-mail. He declined to say how the IRS used the records in its investigations.

The Forest Service, part of the Department of Agriculture, awarded Vigilant a contract valued at as much as \$47,019 for its “CarDetector” system in August 2009, records show. The product scans and captures license plate numbers, compares the data to law enforcement lists of wanted vehicles and sends alerts when such vehicles are detected, according to the company’s website.

“License plate readers are helpful to our law enforcement officers with illegal activities on national forest system lands in California,” Tiffany Holloway, a spokeswoman for the agency, said in an e-mail. She declined to comment about what types of crimes the tools are used to investigate or provide examples of how the technology has helped law enforcement.

Of course, there is a quid pro quo in the IRS’s purchase of license plate tracking technology.

Owe money to the IRS? Having trouble making your mortgage payments? Ever been sued or been arrested?

Soon, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) will know the answers to these questions before you pass through security, and they might affect whether you are cleared for travel.

In an article from October 2013, the *New York Times* reported, “The Transportation Security Administration is expanding its screening of passengers before they arrive at the airport by searching a wide array of government and private databases that can include records like car registrations and employment information.”

The complete list of sources of personal data reviewed by the TSA also includes:



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- private employment information
- vehicle registrations
- travel history
- property ownership records
- physical characteristics
- tax identification numbers
- past travel itineraries
- law enforcement information
- “intelligence” information
- passport numbers
- frequent flier information
- other “identifiers” linked to DHS databases

What does all of this have to do with “national security?” The *New York Times* writes that “the agency says that the goal is to streamline the security procedures for millions of passengers who pose no risk.”

The TSA released the documents detailing the depth of this screening, but has refused to comment publicly.

Speaking under condition of anonymity, a TSA official told the *New York Times* that “the main goal of the program was to identify low-risk travelers for lighter screening at airport security checkpoints, adapting methods similar to those used to flag suspicious people entering the United States.”

If the traveler is a member of an airline’s frequent flier program, the airline will be required to share the person’s travel history with the TSA.

Benjamin Newell, a spokesman for the Air Combat Command — another federal agency that has contracted with Vigilant to provide license plate tracking tools — told *Bloomberg* that all the secret surveillance will make America safer. “The more aware we are of who is entering a military facility, the better we are able to protect the lives and equipment on that base,” Newell said in a phone interview, as reported by *Bloomberg*.

Not everyone is falling for the liberty for safety bait and switch, however. According to the *Bloomberg* story, “NetChoice, a Washington-based trade association that represents e-commerce businesses, is concerned that groups opposing the tools offer ‘no recognition at all of the benefits of license plate recognition in stopping crime or saving lives,’ said Steve DelBianco, its executive director.”

The justification, however, is the mantra of the local and federal agencies speedily erecting the watchtowers of the surveillance state. As [reported by *The New American*](#) in January of this year:

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 this surveillance isn’t reducing crime, what’s the true purpose behind the purchase by the IRS, Homeland Security, the Forest Service, the TSA of software and hardware that can keep anyone under surveillance at any time?

“Ultimately, you’re creating a national database of location information,” Electronic Frontier Foundation staff attorney Jennifer Lynch told the *Washington Post* in February. “When all that data is compiled and aggregated, you can track somebody as they’re going through their life.”

After learning of the IRS’s obtaining of the license plate tracking technology, Lynch updated her criticism. “Especially with the IRS, I don’t know why these agencies are getting access to this kind of information,” she reportedly said. “These systems treat every single person in an area as if they’re under investigation for a crime — that is not the way our criminal justice system was set up or the way things work in a democratic society.”

Lynch is right. Any deprivation of liberty without conforming to the requirements set out in the Fourth Amendment is one too many. If we are a Republic of laws, then the supreme constitutional law of the land must be adhered to every time the government wants to search and seize anything from Americans.

The standard is not whether or not the IRS or the Forest Service claims that investigations create exigent need to violate the Constitution. The standard is the Constitution — for every issue, on every occasion, with no exceptions. Anything less than that is a step toward tyranny.

Taken together, the scope of the snooping carried on by the federal government places every American under the threat of constant surveillance. The courts, Congress, and the president have formed an unholy alliance bent on obliterating the Constitution and establishing a country where every citizen is a suspect and is perpetually under the never-blinking eye of the government.

The establishment will likely continue construction of the surveillance until the entire country is being watched around the clock and every monitored activity is recorded and made retrievable by agents who will have a dossier on every American.



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