



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on September 26, 2016

Small Town Police Tracking License Plates, Sending Data to Homeland Security

The boundaries of the surveillance state are expanding, encircling metropolises and small towns alike, placing city dwellers and country folk under the ever-watchful eye of the federal government.

The latest annexation involves the Nashville suburb of Lebanon, Tennessee. Just prior to the county fair held annually in the town, the police department announced its acquisition of a license plate reader that would “pick up the alpha-numeric sequence of each tag that comes by within its range,” according to P.J. Hardy, Lebanon police public information officer.



The local paper published the details of the town’s purpose for the plate trackers:

The numbers are then put into a computer system, which alerts the department if there’s information with that sequence of letters and numbers that shows the vehicle is stolen, has a stolen tag or if the registered owner is wanted for warrants, according to Hardy.

“Anytime there is an alert from where something has been entered from anywhere across the U.S. with that combination of letters and numbers, it’ll send an alert to wherever we want that to go. In our case it’ll go to our dispatch center,” he said.

The data is shared instantly with the Department of Homeland Security so that the federal surveillance agency can have an eye on everyone driving anywhere, from the Beltway to the Bible Belt.

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An article in the *Wall Street Journal* indicates that this expensive equipment is being bought with money given by the federal Department of Justice to increase the size of the surveillance net it is trying to throw around the entire country.

“The Justice Department has been building a national database to track in real time the movement of vehicles around the U.S., a secret domestic intelligence-gathering program that scans and stores hundreds of millions of records about motorists,” the paper reports.

And an investigation of the devices conducted by the ACLU reveals that the system in use by the Lebanon Police Department and others nationwide has the ability to store “up to 10 photos per vehicle transaction including 4 occupant photos.”

As is the case with every expansion of the surveillance state, Hardy declared the license plate readers to be “just another tool that we have to make sure our community stays safe.”

Crowing about the super-human capacity of these devices, Hardy described how the scanners were mounted and how useful they would be.



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The system features “four individual cameras in one unit, mountable on a patrol car’s rooftop, rear deck or rear trunk deck or could be mounted on a stationary item such as wood.”

What’s more, the installation of the device in a squad car “is like having four officers in a car looking in each corner in each direction looking out for tags.”

This roll-out of mobile and fixed tracking tools raises questions about the proper job of law enforcement. More and more, it seems, police are being trained and equipped to behave like soldiers rather than peace officers. Rather than protecting and defending, cops are injuring and falsely accusing. All of this unfortunate transformation is aided by a federal government all too willing to give billions in grant money and used military equipment to local law enforcement agencies in exchange for additional federal-local “cooperation.”

Not to mention that the expansion of the surveillance state — as chronicled for years by *The New American* — is creating a country where there isn’t an unmonitored place in the real or cyber world. From Trapwire to Prism, from XKeyscore to the monitoring of snail mail, the federal government and the law enforcement that is regularly the beneficiary of its legal plunder of citizens are always watching us.

One picture of a car and its passengers, one unwarranted wiretap, one unwarranted seizure of a phone record, one search of records of an individual’s digital communications is too many. If we are a republic of laws, then the supreme constitutional law of the land must be obeyed.

The standard is not whether the spies or their bosses think the deprivations are necessary. The standard is the Constitution — for every issue, on every occasion, with no exceptions and no excuses. Anything less than that is a step toward tyranny.

Taken together, the surveillance and tracking programs in use by the federal government and their local lackeys place 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 apparatus 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.

The fight can yet be won, though. Americans can attack the sprawling surveillance state on several fronts. First, we must elect men and women to federal office who will honor their oaths of office to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution. Then, once in office, each of them must be held immediately accountable for each and every violation of that oath.

Next, we must fill our state legislatures with men and women who will refuse to enforce any act of the federal government that exceeds the boundaries of its constitutionally granted powers. These lawmakers must force the federal beast back inside its constitutional cage and never accept even a degree of deviation from the blueprint drawn in Philadelphia in 1787.





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