



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on December 20, 2017

Technology-aided Chinese Big Brother Makes Thousands Disappear

The Chinese regime is using countless video cameras and face scans to monitor citizens — and thousands have already vanished. It's a cautionary tale about how modern technology threatens to make totalitarianism truly total.



The surveillance in this case concerns one particular region in China, Xinjiang, which a local police officer chillingly informed is home to “tens of thousands of cameras.” *USA Today* [reports](#) on why Xinjiang has become Big Brother Central, introducing the topic with the story of how a Uighur student disappeared after returning from Egypt:

The student's friends think he joined the thousands — possibly tens of thousands — of people, rights groups and academics estimate, who have been spirited without trial into secretive detention camps for alleged political crimes that range from having extremist thoughts to merely traveling or studying abroad. The mass disappearances, beginning the past year, are part of a sweeping effort by Chinese authorities to use detentions and data-driven surveillance to impose a digital police state in the region of Xinjiang and over its Uighurs, a 10-million strong, Turkic-speaking Muslim minority that China says has been influenced by Islamic extremism.

Along with the detention camps, unprecedented levels of police blanket Xinjiang's streets. Cutting-edge digital surveillance systems track where Uighurs go, what they read, who they talk to and what they say. And under an opaque system that treats practically all Uighurs as potential terror suspects, Uighurs who contact family abroad risk questioning or detention.

The campaign has been led by Chen Quanguo, a Chinese Communist Party official, who was promoted in 2016 to head Xinjiang after subduing another restive region — Tibet. Chen vowed to hunt down Uighur separatists blamed for attacks that have left hundreds dead, saying authorities would “bury terrorists in the ocean of the people's war and make them tremble.”

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Unlike the West, China doesn't have to consider civil liberties when confronting terrorism; the regime can watch all of the people all of the time and imprison (or worse) people on a whim for a long time. (Notable here is that China has a constitution guaranteeing many of the same rights our Constitution does; the authorities just ignore it. That's another cautionary tale — for those mocking respect for a “document created by men in powdered wigs.”)

There certainly is good reason to aggressively tackle Islamic terrorism, but there's something here far scarier than that threat. Ben Franklin noted, “As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters.” Now consider: With our decline in morality combined with the rise in modern tech, do we not face the prospect of being subjugated like never before? Why, with all the news reports about



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artificial intelligence, those jokes about our “robot overlords” may not seem so far-fetched after all.

Discussing the unique times in which we live, columnist Mark Steyn once pointed out that historically government was very distant. To paraphrase him, if you were a medieval villager, an emissary in pantaloons might come around once a decade and give you a hard time, but that was about it. But how successful would, for instance, the American Revolution have been if King George III could view the happenings on video real-time, then press a button and freeze everyone’s bank account?

China isn’t alone in creating Bigger Big Brother. New York City [boasts](#) untold numbers of security cameras, more than 17,000 of which are available for police scrutiny. London’s notorious “Ring of Steel” comprises one camera *for every 14 people*, approximately half a million peering electronic eyes altogether. Yet this is nothing compared to Persistent Surveillance Systems, which has been quietly deployed and, from a plane in the sky, “can track every vehicle and person across an area the size of a small city, for several hours at a time,” [reported](#) the *Washington Post* in 2014.

Returning to the whys behind the watching, the problem of descent into barbarism is often compounded by kid-glove justice. As I [explained](#) in 2008:

To deter bad behavior, you must ensure that the risk/reward factor militates against committing the act — that crime truly won’t pay. To accomplish this, one begins with the understanding that risk is determined by a combination of *two* factors:

- The actual punishment administered.
- The probability that a transgressor will be apprehended, prosecuted and convicted.

This means that as punishment becomes less severe, the apprehension rate must increase to maintain a given deterrent. And one reason we don’t thwart crime as effectively as we could is that we forget the second factor when assessing risk; we only take the punishment into consideration. This creates an economic calculus that favors the criminal.

For instance, it’s [said](#) that theft entails only a .6 percent chance of being caught and convicted; therefore, a thief has to commit an average of about 167 crimes before he will be incarcerated. Now, since the [average sentence](#) for theft is only about two months, this means a thief may serve an average of less than *nine hours per robbery*.

Now here’s the point: A land beset by growing barbarism and slap-on-the-wrist justice can only deter crime via an extremely high apprehension rate. There’s only one way this can be accomplished.

Total surveillance.

It’s another example of how a lack of virtue (of which kid-glove justice, which really is injustice, is a part) begets big government.

Like it or not, it’s man’s nature to sacrifice liberty for security. So before we trade God for government, rectitude for relativism, and virtues for “values,” we should consider that a nation earns liberty by exercising morality — and that chains can be earned, too, and far more easily.

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