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## ***Obama close to knowing all about us***

by **Nat Hentoff**, Aspen Daily News Columnist

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Not long before Dick Arme — a conservative Republican constitutionalist — retired as House majority leader, he gave a speech expressing his worry about the government's increasing blanket surveillance over We the People. He practically begged President George W. Bush to "use these tools we have given you to make us safe in such a manner that'll preserve our freedom" (my book, "The War on the Bill of Rights and the Gathering Resistance," Seven Stories Press, 2003).

Bush's response, alas, was to listen more and more to Vice President Dick Cheney.

And now for the first time in American history, according to the Government Accountability Project's Jesselyn Radack, Attorney General Eric Holder has officially and publicly declared "new guidelines that permit the federal counterterrorism investigators to collect, search and store data about Americans who are not suspected of terrorism, or anything.

"According to the Justice Department, law enforcement and other national security agencies can copy entire databases and sift through the data for suspicious patterns to stop potential terrorist threats" ("Govt. Keeping Data on Americans With No Connection to Terrorism," whistleblower.org, March 23).

Where in the Constitution do "suspicious patterns" — otherwise undefined and outside the jurisdiction of our courts — allow the government to put large and growing numbers of us into databases for future tracking?

Indeed, Radack writes, this gossamer of "information" is being stored "on Americans who are not even thinking about committing a crime."

As of this writing, Mitt Romney appears very likely to be the Republicans' choice to thwart President Barack Obama's desire for a second term. Have you heard any objection from him on this purge of privacy?

And which government agency will lead in this final death sentence for the Fourth Amendment? Emerging from its customary deep secrecy is our nation's (and probably the world's) most immense spy center, the National Security Agency.

I became aware of the NSA when Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho) was in charge of a Senate committee on intelligence activities in 1975. Church was fearfully startled when he came upon the agency, until then operating unknown to the great majority of Americans.

Church became frightened by the NSA's mastery of privacy-piercing technology. As Newsweek later reported in the middle of Bush's war on terror, this technology would eventually enable the agency to secretly work on "computer programs that could sift through vast amounts of information searching for patterns and connections" ("Full Speed Ahead," Evan Thomas, Jan. 8, 2006).

Especially "suspicious patterns."

And dig what Church said in 1975, that the NSA's "capability at any time could be turned around on the American people, and no American would have any privacy left, such is the

capability to monitor everything: telephone conversations, telegrams, it doesn't matter."

Even though this technology was in its infancy compared to its ever-increasing range and depth today, Church had already found out enough to warn:

"There would be no place to hide. ... There would be no way to fight back because the most careful effort to combine together in resistance to the government, no matter how privately it was done, is within the reach of the government to know."

Thirty years after Church's principled stand, The Washington Post reported that the NSA had already been enlisting other intelligence agencies to assist its surveillance of "people inside the country suspected of having terrorist connections" ("Bush Authorized Domestic Spying," Dan Eggen, Dec. 16, 2005).

On what basis? That's classified.

And here we are today, with Obama urgently working to extend his power as commander-in-chief over all of us not in uniform. The Rutherford Institute's John Whitehead, the Frank Church of our time, reports:

"In the small town of Bluffdale, Utah, not far from bustling Salt Lake City, the federal government is quietly erecting what will be the crown jewel of its surveillance empire. Rising up out of the desert landscape, the Utah Data Center (UDC) — a \$2 billion behemoth designed to house a network of computers, satellites and phone lines that stretches across the world — is intended to serve as (hold your breath) the central hub of the National Security Agency's vast spying infrastructure.

"Once complete (the UDC is expected to be fully operational by September 2013) the last link in the chain of the electronic concentration camp that surrounds us will be complete, and privacy, as we have known it, will be extinct" ("Everybody's a Target in the American Surveillance State," rutherford.org, March 26).

Don't give up that fast.

Members of Congress should be sharply awakened by their constituents and reminded what country they're in; they should act for privacy if they want to remain in office.

As for the next president, unless he is Ron Paul (not a chance), he will just continue to wave the flag and sing "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Next week: There's much more to learn from James Bamford, one investigator and reporter who keeps finding out what's being planned inside the NSA. I've credited him for freshly grim news on what awaits this and future generations as the agency takes control of us — no matter who is giving the State of the Union message.

If more schools had civics classes, at least some of our kids and grandkids may yet text one another to organize for freedom.

I don't remember the Occupy Wall Street marchers and drummers ever mentioning the National Security Agency.

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