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Which America do you want?

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With great fanfare, Atlanta officials unveiled a new video surveillance center at a news conference last week.

Atlanta police Chief George Turner expects the "cutting-edge technology" of the cameras to allow police to "stay one step ahead of lawbreakers."

But it does not appear that city leaders who approved this "video integration center" in July did their homework on costs or supposed benefits of the cameras or the accompanying surveillance.

A grant of \$2.6 million of taxpayer funds from the Department of Homeland Security paid for the center, which integrates approximately 100 city-owned cameras, as well as several private groups' and companies' security systems.

An additional \$500,000 of Atlanta taxpayer dollars and \$1.2 million from Georgia taxpayers brought the total cost to taxpayers to \$4.3 million --- not to mention a reported half-million more raised by the Atlanta Police Foundation.

At the time of City Council approval, costs to operate, staff and maintain the center were unknown and unreported. Also unclear is whether this figure includes the city-owned surveillance cameras or merely the surveillance center. Worse, it covers only one of 131 square miles within Atlanta's city limits.

City leaders should have looked closely at systems they wish to emulate, specifically Chicago's, where former Mayor Richard Daley promised to have a "camera on every corner" of the city by 2016. Then they would have seen the results of an extensive study by the Illinois ACLU, showing that the 10,000-plus cameras contributed to a paltry 4,000

arrests in the city in the system's first four years. The \$60 million system contributed to one in 200 arrests citywide, or .5 percent.

There is no indication as to whether these arrests were from violent or property crimes, or led to convictions, a statistic more closely related to solving crimes. It is likely that, in the best-case scenario, cameras move crime from the areas surveilled to those that are not.

In London, where an estimated 1 million cameras track the daily lives of Londoners, a 2009 BBC News report cited an internal police audit showing that for every 1,000 cameras, one crime was solved.

Roughly 80 percent of the crime in London goes unsolved, according to the Cato Institute's David Rittgers, so it looks like the installation of surveillance cameras does not solve much of anything.

Referring to London's surveillance system, former British shadow home secretary and current Conservative Party MP, David Davis said, "[Closed-circuit TV] leads to massive expense and minimum effectiveness. It creates a huge intrusion on privacy, yet provides little or no improvement in security."

In New York, another major city that Atlanta's leaders said they wish to emulate, surveillance methods were questioned this month by civil-rights advocates who noted that certain ethnic neighborhoods were more closely surveilled than others.

Those advocates questioned the use of racial profiling by the city's law enforcement to combat crime and their use of "ancestries of interest" to determine the allocation of surveillance resources.

Such systems lead residents to have a false sense of security as they abdicate personal responsibility for their own safety and security, delegating them to the ever-growing and ever-present government.

Dependence on the state --- and the taxpayers who pay for this mission creep --- relinquishes responsibilities that are the price we pay for individual liberty.

Is this the America in which you want to live?

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