



Police scan us. Soon we'll scan them

August 06, 2012 2:45 am • [By NAT HENTOFF](#)

Very soon you will be able to go to the airport and not cower at having a Homeland Security cop rummage around your private parts or command you to be filmed for any trace association with terrorism.

Instead, according to website Gizmodo, "within the next year or two, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security will instantly know everything about your body, clothes and luggage with a new laser-based molecular scanner fired from 164 feet (50 meters) away.

"From traces of drugs or gun powder on your clothes to what you had for breakfast to the adrenaline level in your body — agents will be able to get any information they want without even touching you" ("Hidden Government Scanners Will Instantly Know Everything About You From 164 Feet Away," gizmodo.com, July 10).

The Picosecond Programmable Laser, says a local CBS report, "works by blasting its target with lasers which vibrate molecules that are then read by the machine that determine(s) what substances a person has been exposed to. This could be (anything from) Semtex explosives to the bacon and egg sandwich they had for breakfast that morning" ("New Homeland Security Laser Scanner Reads People at Molecular Level," washington.cbslocal.com, July 11).

All this and more from 164 feet away.

And dig this: The laser's original inventor, Genia Photonics, formed a partnership in 2011 with In-Q-Tel, a partnership chartered by the CIA and Congress!

Citing In-Q-Tel's website, CBS D.C. reports that the company is to act as "a bridge between the Agency and a new set of technology innovators."

Although ignored by the CIA, our rule of law forbids the agency from spying domestically on us. Congress ignores this rule of law as well, but it is forbidden to do so.

There has been no objection to this further invasion of our bodily privacy by President Barack Obama. And is there any sign that President Mitt Romney would likely overrule his royal predecessor?

Even though CBS D.C. says that "the technology could be used by 'Big Brother,'" it adds that the laser's inventor says "the device could be far more beneficial being used for medical purposes to check for cancer in real time, lipids detection and patient monitoring."

Could those patients' lives be saved without the CIA and Congress going along to use this technology to break the law? If anybody in Congress has seriously raised this point, I'd sure like to hear about it.

Meanwhile, I am encouraged by another recent story that shows we have knowledgeable inventors creating technologies that protect our Constitution against the lawless CIA's government colleagues. On July 3, the day before some of us meaningfully celebrated Independence Day, a local CBS report declared: "ACLU-NJ Launches Smartphone App That Lets Users Secretly Record Police Stops" (newyork.cbslocal.com, July 3).

Why record in secret? Because if a citizen openly records a cop's particularly brutish stop and frisk or other unvarnished invasion of the Fourth Amendment, that person is very likely to be arrested in some states.

"There's really only three buttons (on the Police Tape app) that the user needs to deal with," says Alexander Shalom of the American Civil Liberties Union's New Jersey office. "There's a know your rights button that educates the citizen about

their rights when encountering police on the street, in a car, in their home or when they're going to be placed under arrest, and there's a button to record audio and a button to record video."

Adds CBS New York: "The app lets users record audio and video discreetly with a stealth mode that hides the fact that the recording is happening."

The ACLU-NJ's Shalom challenges us: "You can think back to when Rodney King was beaten at the hands of the LAPD. For years, we've watched the police on video and that's led to reforms and police accountability, but now that cellphones and smartphones are becoming more ubiquitous, people have this ability to videotape.

"It really is a cutting-edge tool to ensure accountability in the 21st century."

Imagine that! Citizens are using furtive methods to maintain their constitutional rights by proving that police are dismembering these freedoms!

Do you believe that Thomas Jefferson would hesitate for a minute to use this technology?

According to the ACLU-NJ's website, Android users can now download the Police Tape app, which will be available to iPhone users sometime this summer.

It's time for the national ACLU to get the word out to all its affiliates and make sure smartphone users can get this app!

In June, the ACLU's New York affiliate released a somewhat different app called Stop-and-Frisk Watch. I'll continue to inform you about the future of the ACLU-NJ Police Tape app and other such developments around the country.

And we should all bear in mind, Alexander Shalom tells The (N.J.) Star-Ledger, that "police often videotape civilians and civilians have a constitutionally protected right to videotape police.

"When people know they're being watched, they tend to behave well" ("N.J. ACLU unveils 'stealth' app allowing citizens to secretly record police," Eunice Lee, nj.com, July 3).

So do cops. So do presidents. This landmark return of our president, Congress, state and local police to our rule of law will continue here next week.

Nat Hentoff is a nationally renowned authority on the First Amendment and the Bill of Rights. He is a member of the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, and the Cato Institute, where he is a senior fellow.