

## America inching toward police state

By: Brian Siegel - November 26, 2012

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Remember, remember the ninth of November. It was a day not unlike any other, but a day that is yet another constantly overlooked reminder of the terrible state of this great nation. It is the day David Petraeus' resignation was accepted.

So, wonderful American citizens, I'd like to take this time to have a little chat about what most of you probably missed in the news this month. Surely you saw CIA Chief Director David Petraeus get busted for his extramarital affair, but you may be missing a vital underlying issue. The United States is slowly but surely becoming a surveillance state — if it isn't blatantly one already. We no longer have the privacy we once held so dear, and it seems like most of us are just flat out OK with that.

Let's backtrack to how this Petraeus scandal all began. Jill Kelley gets harassing emails criticizing her relationship with Petraeus and other government members. Kelley contacts an FBI agent who helps push through an investigation. The investigation leads them through cyberspace to find that an account used by both Paula Broadwell and her husband had been sending the emails. The FBI subpoenas the digital records of Broadwell, which leads them to discover the relationship between Petraeus and Broadwell.

If this were a national security or counterintelligence issue, the FBI wouldn't even need a subpoena. Cases like this one can show the overreaching scope of the federal government. Because of this power, United States citizens are being stripped of their constitutional right of due process. The government can rummage through your most intimate conversations on the flimsy proof of probable cause.

“They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety.”

That is not a quote from “V for Vendetta” or well-structured rhetoric from the latest Batman movie, but Benjamin Franklin himself warning about the dangers of sacrificing civil liberties for safety.

Franklin was not talking freedom in the sense that you should be able to do whatever you want in anarchy, but rather “essential liberty”: those guaranteed in the Constitution — of speech, the right to property, privacy and the pursuit of happiness. Contrary to popular belief, the role of the government is not to try and bargain civil liberties for safety. If you have nothing to hide, then you shouldn't be afraid to give up your privacy to the government, right? Wrong. That has been the mind-set of every police state that has ever

existed. Even if you believe the government will let you live in anonymity because you have nothing to hide, it is setting a terrible precedent.

Do we have faith in the moral integrity of the government to act appropriately with our private information? As if the government has had a flawless record of moral fiber. We can't even trust the head of the brightest intelligence agency in the world to keep his affairs quiet.

This type of invasiveness is a drastic overreach of government power. We should never be subjected to an intrusive style of government that is constantly watching our every move. America was founded on the right to privacy and due process, neither of which is respected. Is that our idea of freedom? That is not the America that was founded 2 1/2 centuries ago and not the America I want to live in.

But, we can curtail it and even revise the current surveillance structure. Julian Sanchez, a research fellow at the CATO Institute, suggests that Congress should extend the "1986 Electronic Communications Privacy Act into the 21st century — requiring a warrant for all law-enforcement access to communications contents and tightening the rules for access to sensitive information, such as cell phone location data."

That would certainly be a step in the right direction and a major solution to a portion of the surveillance issues. If we let the status quo of surveillance continue in its current trend, then we will soon not know the ways in which our private information is used and stored, if we even do now.

Sadly, even as you read this column your digital footprint is available to the government. Welcome to the Big Brother era, my friends. I hope none of your skeletons come out of the closet.