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May. 03, 2010

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Arena Ref: [Fred Barbash](#)

Did "big brother" work in Times Square? Will familiar post 9/11 partisanship over national security soon break out?

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Roger Pilon

Vice President for Legal Affairs, Cato Institute :

Does the latest bombing attempt, in Times Square over the weekend, justify urban surveillance cameras? On balance, yes. To be sure, police can abuse those tapes -- all law enforcement is subject to abuse. But the tapes are often crucial in apprehending suspects and in preventing future crimes. When you're out in public, you shouldn't expect still to be in private.

Equally important, however, surveillance cameras, prudently used, tend to be more reliable than the proverbial "cop-on-the-beat," to which no one objects. Only yesterday, for example, the Washington Post ran a piece, "[Eyewitness testimony in an imperfect world](#)," about the 14-year-old boy mistakenly charged, based on eyewitness accounts, in the recent multiple murder case here in DC. As the Post story noted, eyewitness testimony is "the most common cause of wrongful convictions." Far from being a threat to civil liberties, then, properly used surveillance cameras can be an important element in protecting civil liberties.

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