

False Sense Of Security

Young Patriots Essay Contest

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By stressing natural rights and civil liberties, the Bill of Rights essentially protects individual citizens from a potential large oppressive government. In particular, the 4th Amendment enforces privacy, requiring police to obtain warrants and probable cause prior to searching private property.



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Its purpose is to prevent citizens from being wrongly targeted by the police or other government officials. These important values, such as privacy and securing individual citizens' rights, were what our country was founded upon and should not be compromised in the face of fear. As one of America's most prominent Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, has said, "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

While global terrorism may have not been an issue during Franklin's time, the principle remains the same and is an integral part of America's purpose and overall being. It is what the Founders fought the Revolutionary War over. The notion of liberty is a crucial and defining factor of what separates America from the rest of the world; it is our national character.

Global terrorism remains to be a serious threat that cannot be taken lightly, but we must not compromise fundamental values in order to create a false sense of security. Increasing government surveillance and completely disregarding citizens' right to privacy only extends the government's power; it does not make us any safer from terrorism. Instead, this only harms ordinary citizens. If the

government cannot prove that a citizen has broken any laws, they should not have the ability to infringe upon rights that the government has sworn to uphold. As a nation, we must stick to our intrinsic values; we cannot give up on the ideas that this country was built upon just because an issue arises.

Moreover, the destruction of freedom is what the terrorists openly want. They boast about wanting to kill all Americans. Terrorism is defined as "the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purposes." Terrorists operate on the notion of fear and by restricting freedom, or essentially giving into that fear, we would be succumbing to their intentions.

Instead of abandoning fundamental values, we need to turn to them. The Fourth Amendment is meant to protect citizens from "unreasonable searches and seizures," stressing the need for "probable cause supported by Oath or affirmation." This is how the government should approach terrorism, and actually following the Bill of Rights would make us safer. Instead of collecting information on everyone, which is arguably unconstitutional, the government should focus its efforts specifically on people for whom there is a "probable cause," meaning that these people actually pose a serious threat. If the goal is to prevent terrorism, resources should be focused upon suspected terrorists with probable cause, not ordinary citizens who have nothing to hide.

Expanding government security makes us less safe. FBI whistleblower

Suspicion Is Not A Virtue: Mass Surveillance And Global Terrorism

Coleen Rowley argues that “the massive collect-it-all, dragnet approach has made terrorist activity more difficult to spot and prevent.” Edward Snowden is credited for revealing how massive US surveillance has become, which raises the question of, “If you’re looking for a needle in a haystack, how does it help to add hay?” In other words, if there is so much information, most of which is useless, how do we spot out those who are actual terrorists and pose serious threats? This “sheer volume” of information makes it more difficult to “connect the dots” and only becomes useful after a terrorist attack, when looking in hindsight. In many cases of terrorist attacks, the government had information on the terrorists, but were not able to actually prevent the attack. Ultimately, the government’s intelligence system is too complex and tough to navigate, failing to fulfill its main purpose - the safety of Americans citizens.

Because there has been no “pattern of government abuses,” Roger Pilon and Richard A. Epstein claim that “we should be thankful that here, at least, government has done its job and done it well.” They also write that the “necessary loss of privacy [is] trivial, certainly in comparison to the losses that would have arisen if the government had failed to discern the pattern that let it thwart the 2009 New York subway bombing plot by Colorado airport shuttle driver Najibullah Zazi.” But how well of a job has the government actually done, particularly in protecting its citizens? Conveniently enough, the article leaves out instances where government surveillance has failed to prevent terrorist attacks.

“As an FBI whistleblower and witness for several US official inquiries into 9/11 intelligence failures,” Rowley has first-hand experience with the

US government’s security failures and lists them out in her article. For instance, in 2009, Nidal Hasan was an army major and psychiatrist, who had shot up a military base in Fort Hood, Texas, killing 13 people and wounding 30. However, US officials knew that Hasan had been writing emails to Anwar al-Awlaki, an “imam” who had assisted the 9/11 hijackers. Another instance of security failure regards the “underwear bomber,” Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab. Prior to the attempted bombing, Abdulmutallab’s own father contacted US officials about him, but no precautions were taken. Additionally, the fact that Abdulmutallab was able to successfully board the plane, despite having explosives, raises the question of how efficient and legitimate airport security actually is. At the end of the day, it was the plane passengers’ actions that prevented fatalities, not the US government. Another example is the Boston Marathon bombing carried out by the Tsarnaev brothers. Prior to this bombing, a Russian intelligence agency warned the US about one of the bombers. Nevertheless, the US took no precautionary action.

While one of the main purposes of government is to protect its citizens, government surveillance in the name of safety has resulted in a false sense of security that undermines the Bill of Rights. Solomon’s article in Fortune reveals an ulterior motive -- money. About 70% of the National Security Agency’s \$10.8 billion budget goes to private firms, which Solomon believes “are all too eager to boost their profits at the expense of taxpayers and civil liberties.” Therefore, the government’s surveillance has created a big market, resulting in “a joint venture of government officials and private-sector opportunists with massive power and zero accountability.”

In the context of safety, the biggest flaw of government surveillance is its inefficiency, resulting in neither security nor privacy. Neil M. Richards claims that, “The most salient harm of surveillance is that it threatens a value [he has] elsewhere called ‘intellectual privacy.’” Privacy is crucial to this nation, and like Richards says, “freedoms of thought, belief, and private speech. . . have been underappreciated.” However, there is a greater underlying problem that causes this lack of privacy: government power. Our government has become too large and too powerful, using safety as its excuse. This abuse of power shows that instead of shying away from our Founders’ values, we must embrace them.

Danielle Yampolsky is the third place winner of the 2016 Young Patriots Essay Contest.

Citations are available upon request.