

# Government Surveillance: Good or Bad

## 1) Introduction

With the advancing nature of challenges to the states, government surveillance is an essential tool to advance and strengthen national interest security and counter these challenges.

## 2) Government Surveillance: Bird's Eyeview

## 3) Government Surveillance: The Positive Aspects

3-1) Government surveillance is a potential and effective way to safeguard national security

cases in point: Intelligence based operations

- (ii) Times square Blast
- (iii) Najib Ullah Taxi case.

3-2) Government surveillance significantly aids in reducing crime: Early detection and proactive measures

a) Newzealand man shooting<sup>?</sup> case study

b) Safe city project: Islamabad

c) Trojan shield Operation - Practical application of government surveillance and crime detection

3.3) Government surveillance also act as a potential counter force against economic and financial crimes

a) case in point: Transaction surveillance and currency transfer reports in Pakistan

b) case in point: European Union's surveillance of transaction records as an anti-money laundering effort.

3.4) Government surveillance proactively aids in Public health and protection against pandemics

case in point: South Korea's contact tracing app and covid-19

3.5) Government surveillance is a potential tool for informed policy and decision making

a) proactive policy actions based on surveillance data

case in point: CCTV monitoring and ~~security~~ threat detection

b) Intelligence based operations.

#### 4) Government Surveillance: Negative Aspects

- (a) Excessive government surveillance leads to violations of Human rights - promoting hard image of <sup>the</sup> country
- (b) Potential chances of misuse of information - Data Breaches
- (c) Psychological impacts: Air of mistrust among citizens

#### 5) Government Surveillance: A Balanced Approach

Government Surveillance amidst transparent oversight procedures and accountability

#### 6) Conclusion

The trade off between privacy and security is a complex one, and its one that we have to make in a thoughtful and nuanced way

(Barack Obama)

## Essay

"Surveillance is not inherently bad; it is a tool, and like any tool, it can be used for good and evil"

~ Bruce Schneier

Government surveillance has existed since histories, either on a massive or a limited scale. It serves as an important tool for the government to safeguard the national interest and promote peace and prosperity in the nation. Its like the guardian oversight, aimed at protection and wellbeing of the nation. In this technologically advanced and innovative world, the need for government surveillance is even more.

With the advancing nature of challenges faced by the states, government surveillance is an essential tool to advance and strengthen national security and counter these challenges. Government surveillance serves to protect national security and reduce crime rate in any society and promote peace and stability in the society. However, on the other side of the coin, government surveillance is also a potential threat to human rights,

(2)

and it leaves negative psychological impacts on the nation amidst the continuous privacy breaches. Thus, due to its negative impacts there exists a strong need of a regulatory framework for government surveillance, to utilize maximum benefit out of it.

Government surveillance is the process of monitoring and having an oversight on the activities of the citizens. It can be done in various ways, from digital communication monitoring to physical monitoring. Amidst technological advancements, the methods of government surveillance have also advanced in a nuanced way; CCTV monitoring, video monitoring, surveillance of text messages are some of the procedures used for government surveillance. Government surveillance can be done in both active and passive ways; along with covert and overt procedures. Governments across the world, like China, Russia, North Korea, United States and India etc, have performed government surveillance via various methods, ~~to~~ to ensure the well-being of their respective nations. Following are the potential

(3)

benefits of government surveillance:

First of all, government surveillance is a potential and effective tool to safeguard and promote national security within the state. Government surveillance aids in <sup>maintaining</sup> national security by <sup>helping in</sup> detection and dismantling of anti-state actors and activities. The practical manifestation of this fact is the intelligence based operations against anti-state actors like terrorists and spies. The operations by Pakistan military, against terrorists, ~~was~~ being based on surveillance and intelligence data was a major success. Likewise, detection of Indian spy, Kulbushan Jadhav from Balochistan, who was promoting anti-state activities in the province was also a classical example of importance and use of surveillance by government to protect national security of the state. Likewise, the orchestrators of Times Square Bomb Blast ~~per~~ plots were captured by intercepting emails; ~~and~~ a crucial step towards national security of the state. Moreover, the Najib ulah Zaki case is also a testament to the need of government surveillance to neutralize

(4)

threats, like terrorism, to the national security of the nation. In Najibullah Qazi case, a subway terrorist attack was prevented due to the surveillance efforts, which were based on tracking communications between Qazi and Al Qaeda group and ultimately thwarting their plan. Conclusively, government surveillance holds a foremost significance for the maintenance of national security of the state.

Moving further, government surveillance also aids in reducing crime in a significant manner. Its role in early crime detection and proactive policing is tremendously remarkable. By relying on metadata analysis of CCTV cameras, interception of communication devices and texts, government surveillance ~~can~~ helps in identifying potential threat zones and resultant aiding proactive measures to reduce the particular crime. The recent manifestation of this phenomenon was the interception and ultimately prevention <sup>execution of</sup> of a mass shooting program in New Zealand in 2021; where surveillance of social media posts and text messages led to the detection of plan. Moreover,

(5)

there exists a direct link between covert surveillance and monitoring with the reduction of crime rate in a particular area. Islamabad safe city project is the testament to this fact. Under this project, thousands of surveillance cameras were installed in the territory, which ultimately led to the reduction in crime according to the research reports. Along with this, the Operation Trojan shield, which dismantled an organized crime network with the surveillance efforts of FBI, also highlights the significance of government surveillance in reducing crime and promoting peace and stability in the region. To summarize, government surveillance is an essential tool for ~~crime~~ reducing and intercepting crime.

Moreover, government surveillance also act as a potential counter against economic and financial vices operating against / threatening the economic stability of the state. In this world of globalization and economic imperialism, promotion and protection of economic interests is the matter of death and life for a state. Government surveillance



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thus is essential for the protection of economic interests. It aids in the early detection ~~and~~ of financial crimes, ~~thus~~ <sup>and thus</sup> various states across the globe have developed effective government surveillance in the field of economy. For example, the maintenance of track record of suspicious transactions and the practice of currency transfer reports in Pakistan have been an effective surveillance practice against financial crimes like money laundering. Another testament ~~is~~ of government surveillance is the practice of ~~European~~ surveillance of transaction records by the European Union, to deter money laundering practices. Thus, amidst the foremost significance of economic stability, the government surveillance act as a potential hindrance towards economic crisis and promotes economic stability.

Furthermore, government surveillance also offers potential benefits in <sup>the field of</sup> health care. ~~the~~ Firstly, the surveillance data is helpful in identifying risk areas of outbreak of particular disease and thus aids in taking preventive

(7)

measures against it. Secondly, it can also aid in reducing ~~the~~ and limiting the spread of particular disease. The very phenomenon manifested by South Korea's contact tracing app during the COVID-19 pandemic. This contact tracing app provided citizens with the potentially affected areas by the pandemic, based on government surveillance data, thus acting as a major tool to limit the spread of the disease. Thus, along with economic and security fronts, government surveillance also serves as a potential aid in healthcare too.

Last but not the least, government surveillance ~~data~~ is a potential tool for informed policy and decision making for the government, resultanty enhancing governance. Firstly it aids in detecting the social issues at initial stage and drafting proactive policies against them. For example, the government can use its surveillance data from CCTV monitoring, to intercept potential sites of ~~threat~~ for any existence

(8)

crime and resultantly increase police patrolling and number of guards in that particular area. Moreover, the intelligence ~~based~~ operations based on government surveillance are also a testament to effective and sound policy making aided by surveillance. Thus, the significance of government surveillance in drafting effective policies is also of paramount importance.

However, despite the number of benefits it ~~has~~ entails government surveillance, along with its very existence, it also has negative impacts. First of all is the breach of human rights introduced by government surveillance. It curbs on the basic human rights of privacy, freedom of speech, association and expression. This not only alienates people of the state but also damages the international image of the state, labelling it as a hard and rigid state. The very example of it is the North Korea and its internationally rigid appearance due to its excessive government surveillance over its subjects.

(9)

Moreover, <sup>amidst</sup> the government surveillance lies the potential of data breach and misuse of the data to harm individuals. All these potential curbs and dangers due to government surveillance, <sup>also</sup> pose negative psychological impacts on the citizens.

It inculcates sense of fear, due to continuous surveillance, and mistrust among the citizens; which is eventually destructive to the very essence of the government.

Thus, in order to fully utilize the potential benefits of government surveillance and reduce its negative and destructive outcomes, there exists a need for an effective regulatory framework for the government surveillance.

It should be limited targeting potential subjects and avoiding massive surveillance of common citizens. Along with this, government surveillance should operate on the principles of transparency and strict institutional oversight to reduce the potential threats of misuse and breach of the data.

(10)

In a nutshell, government surveillance ~~has~~<sup>is</sup> ~~become~~ an essential tool to the security and protection of the state and its interests. It aids in safeguard of national security, <sup>and</sup> reduces crime rate in the state. Alongwith this, it also serves effective services in healthcare, economy and governance. It is a potential tool to the survival of the state. By reducing its negative impacts and taking confidence of the public, with transparent procedures, the optimal potential of government surveillance can be practically realized, as Barack Obama claims,

"The trade off between privacy and security is a complex one, and it's one that we have to make in a thoughtful and nuanced way".