

Britain's intrusive surveillance system, a threat to civil liberties

By Graham Vabgerben, Global Research, 11 May 2017

Peter Hitchens recently [mentioned](#) in his blog that technology will eventually enslave us all. He referred to the recent film "Ghost in the Shell" thus:

"I was intrigued to see that the future world in which this film is set is – once again – in a place of gloom and decay, much like now but worse. There are gangsters and sordid bars, people smoke, everyone's crammed into hamster-cage flats in inhuman megacities. Ever since Blade Runner and Alien, and also in Minority Report, new technology is not seen as a road to happiness, liberty or prosperity. I used to think this was pessimistic. Now I think they've got it about right."

Today we live in an age where there is a technology battle front being waged against citizens of the West and the people are losing it on every front – nowhere is that battle raging most in Western democracies than in Britain.

Britain already has a reputation for deploying the most [intrusive](#) surveillance systems against its own people in the Western world. Widely reported just a few days ago, it appears the government has just awarded itself the ability to monitor and surveil the live communications of the British general public at will. In addition, it also forces [encryption backdoors](#) to be made available to the authorities by privacy driven communications services such as WhatsApp. This is an exploit that will see a considerable degrading of security for everyone in Britain, which will inevitably lead to hugely increased hacking by criminals.

The reality though is much more insidious than first thought. Although we all see the sense in security keeping up with fast changing technologies, the government has been passing laws that in effect has done little more than salami-slice our civil liberties and human rights to the point of extinguishing their real effectiveness. They are being systematically dismantled, driven through the false narrative of security. As a reality check, you are far more likely to die at the hands of your underwear or toaster than a terrorist.

Just last month legislation was [passed](#) that contained a section stating police can order the shutdown of communications on a mobile phone. This power also allows authorities to restrict or disable a person's mobile phone communications (at will) if they are suspected of even being associated with crimes, whether or not they have actually committed a crime or not.

Any idea of where this is leading to? How about a report by [Salon](#) entitled: "**The chilling tech that brings "Minority Report" inches from reality.**"

Salon reviews a new documentary on "Pre-Crime" that shows how police use big data to stalk potential offenders who've yet to break the law.

"As shown in "[Pre-Crime](#)"— the documentary premiered last weekend at Toronto's Hot Docs film festival — police departments around the world are partnering with private companies to use public data, personal information and algorithms to predict where illegal actions are most likely to occur and, crucially, who is most likely to commit them."

And just for clarity the German director of the documentary says "Pre-crime" is a reference to a Hollywood movie called "Minority Report" in which people are arrested for crimes they have not committed – yet.

The documentary explains how police forces are now already using algorithms to calculate the risk of an individual breaking the law.

“There’s a list in Chicago with 1,500 people on it. They are under surveillance by the police and there is a special algorithm that calculates the risk of you committing a crime.”

Salon asks the question – *“There are predictive police programs in Fresno, Philadelphia, Chicago, and in Kent and London, England featured in the film. Are these all pilot programs? And the chilling answer from the director of the documentary “Not any longer. Kent’s program is 4 years old.”*

Based on a story by famed science fiction writer Philip K. Dick, “Minority Report” is a thriller set in Washington D.C. in 2054, where police utilise technology to arrest and convict murderers before they commit their crime

The documentary maker emphasises the point that:

“Forecasting software and algorithms that have been criticised as inaccurate and arbitrary are used to collect information, and monitor and flag people. But predictive tools are only as good as the data they’re fed. With scant evidence of the reliability of the data sources or the accuracy of the data crunching, misfires are a guarantee. In this chilling and explosive in-depth examination into the modern age of policing, directors Monika Hielscher and Matthias Heider pose an important question: How much freedom and human awareness are we willing to give to the limited logic of technology.”

The New York Times [reports](#) that

“The American Civil Liberties Union, citing reports that the Chicago Police Department used computer analysis to create a “heat list” that unfairly associated innocent people with criminal behavior, has warned about the dangers of the police using big data. Even companies that make money doing this sort of work warn that it comes with civil rights risks.”

Back in Britain, we know that our own Prime Minister is no friend of civil liberties when considering her record as Home Secretary. She oversaw GCHQ’s illegal bulk harvesting programmes pre and post Snowden revelations. She tried to pass the Communications Data Bill (also known as the snoopers charter) in 2012 but it was rejected at draft stage when the Lib Dems withdrew their support for it. The Investigatory Powers Act, was a much broader bill but this was really her second attempt at introducing the snoopers’ charter.

She has no doubt supported the Espionage Bill – a proposal to criminalise whistleblowers and jail journalists as foreign spies. The 20% cut in the Police budget has been replaced with a ramping up of GCHQ’s budget – an unelected agency who act in the shadows and break the law with impunity without full scrutiny or governance, and who, by all accounts, are inextricably interlinked to that other notorious lawbreaker – the NSA.

Don’t forget that Kent police have allegedly been using this system secretly for four years. Once again we find Britain being the pioneer of the dismantling of democratic freedoms and rights without even as much as the faintest debate as to its legitimacy.

In a [Guardian](#) article just two days ago regarding the Britain’s rapidly declining democracy, it reported a truly disgraceful pre-crime operation already in practice:

“Documents seen by the Observer show that this was a proposal to capture citizens’ browsing history en masse, recording phone conversations and applying natural language processing to the recorded voice data to construct a national police database, complete with scores for each

citizen on their propensity to commit crime. The plan put to the minister was Minority Report. It was pre-crime. And the fact that Cambridge Analytica (the company involved in data collection) is now working inside the Pentagon is, I think, absolutely terrifying.”

Cambridge Analytica have been heavily associated with ‘[dark money](#)’ and [the shadowy actors that secured the Brexit vote](#) in Britain last year. Its parent company is known for involvement in military disinformation campaigns of social media and voter targeting and is used by the military and politicians to study and manipulate public opinion and political will.

In the meantime, **Theresa May** has wholeheartedly pushed for Britain’s withdrawal from the European convention on human rights – which would leave Gt. Britain as the only European nation in the same position as the pariah state of [Belarus](#) where corruption is endemic through the entirety of its society and criticism of the president and the government is a criminal offence.

UK Prime Minister Theresa May

Hence, the reason why such programmes are dangerous in the hands of a government that not only has ‘form’ but will soon be an emboldened one come June 8th when what is left of an already weakened opposition splinters and then disintegrates, leaving civil society more vulnerable than ever.

And as [Civil Society Future](#) points out in a recent article on civil society in an age of surveillance:

“Citizens are increasingly categorised and profiled according to data assemblages, for example through data scores used in the [criminal justice system](#) or by social [credit scores](#), as developed in China. The purpose of such scores is to predict future behaviour and allocate resources and eligibility for services (or punishment) accordingly.

Can you imagine living in a society that predicts future behaviour and allocates resources and eligibility for services, or dishes out punishments – though an algorithm?

And when it comes to these citizen controlling pieces of legislation – mission creep is the big danger. [Terrorism laws](#) developed from 2000, which were designed to hunt down ideological killers, have since been added to or amended twelve times. The result is that local authorities and councils are now able to [brazenly use these laws](#) to prosecute citizens for feeding the homeless, the BBC to pursue non payment of its licence fee, or any government agency to secretly follow people without their knowledge and record their movements. This should be seen as nothing less than abuse of power.

I asked **Jim Killock**, Executive Director of [Open Rights Group](#) for an opinion on pre-crime systems. His response was unequivocal:

“Pre-crime detection systems undermine the underlying tenet of our judicial system – that we are innocent until proven guilty. They fail to meet any test of proportionality and threaten our privacy rights.

“Recently the Digital Economy Act gave the police the powers to disable people’s phones if they are suspected of criminal activity. This is just one example of how such systems can be used against individuals who have not actually been found guilty of a crime.

We need a full public debate about whether such systems are acceptable in a democratic society. These systems depend on algorithms, which we know can replicate biases that are found in society – for example around race, class and gender. We need more transparency about how these systems are developed, applied and monitored.

We know that surveillance has been used against the victims of crime, such as **Stephen Lawrence**'s family, as well as Green politicians, such as **Caroline Lucan MP** and **Baroness Jenny Jones**. It is not difficult to imagine how these systems could be used against anyone who challenges the status quo or holds positions that are not considered mainstream.”