President Obama Channels Lord Cromwell:

Great Statesmen Tamper with Packets

by John Stanton

Glenn Greenwald’s Snowden dossier concerning the American Leviathan’s practice of harvesting, storing and analyzing the information/conversations of its own and the world’s political, military, economic and cultural gate keepers is fascinating. This is so not due to the technological sophistication and global reach of the USA’s intelligence capabilities, but for what it implies about the current state and future of the collective nation-states known as Western Democracies. And it undercuts nearly every ideal in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, leaving the dry, functional and core text of the US Constitution as the last mooring line to—paraphrasing Russell Crowe in the movie the Gladiator—“The dream that was once the United States.” It also challenges the foundations of the “free” market and “free will”: but more on that in a moment.

Critics of surveillance technologies and intelligence gathering--and advocates of the nebulus concept of selfhood and privacy-- would do well to school themselves by studying the documents that outline America’s national security strategy. Most all of these are publically available at a collection of websites: DTIC, Cryptome, Public Intelligence, Cryptocomb, and the National Defense University, et al. If critics do not understand their opponents and their thinking—as Sun Tzu once advised—then building a convincing case against the ills of the world is a Vaudevillian exercise. Further, the willful ignorance by proponents and opponents of the history of spying, surveillance and even privacy cripples the thinking of both sides. Absent availing oneself of learning, there can be no meaningful discussion on matters of this import.

It is absolutely vital to visit with the historical literary record as it is critical to understanding the philosophy and foundations of the Western world’s approach to intelligence gathering, surveillance and the role of the state/church, corporation and individual in that process. Brushing off this vast literary goldmine is done at one’s own peril.

Literature to the Rescue!

As authors David Rosen and Aaron Santesso point out in the exceptional The Watchman in Pieces: Surveillance, Literature and Personhood (Yale 2013), the matter of individuality or personhood—and how much “others” (state, society) should legitimately know about that individual—is a centuries old matter dating, at least, back to the Middle Ages. The topic was the subject of some of the Western world’s top practitioners of poetry and prose, along with heavyweight political and cultural philosophers and critics. Among them: Swift, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Richardson (Clarissa), Hume, Mill. James, Adam Smith, Pope, Defoe, Locke, Bentham, Thomas More, Goffman (dramaturgy).

Is President Barack Obama’s—or for that matter G.W. Bush and W.J. Clinton’s--thinking all that different from Cromwell? Is it a surprise that the US Postal Service, Telecoms and ISP’s collect metadata? Sure, the speed of exchange has changed and the human geospatial landscape has altered, but the core
thinking remains the same. It is important, of course, not reach-back and pulling forward thoughts that are out of place in the 21st Century. But, as evolutionary social animals, one core absolute appears to hold: What in the world are other people thinking about me or us? Who is watching?

According to Rosen and Santesso, “For [England’s] Cromwell it had been perfectly clear that a state controlled post ‘might be made the agent in discovering and preventing many wicked designs daily contrived against the piece and welfare of the commonwealth, the intelligence whereof could not be communicated except by letters’...Samuel Moreland in the service of Charles II subsequently helped develop a system of opening, copying and rescaling letters passed through the post office...The [Secret Office] ‘had tricks to open letters more skillfully than anywhere in the world...It was not possible to be a great statesman without tampering with packets.” And, as Rosen and Santesso point out, it is to Elizabeth the First’s Francis Walsingham that history turns for “the beginnings of a surveillance bureaucracy ahead of its time.”

It bears repeating. America’s national security apparatus has made very clear its intention—through Military Information Support Operations (MISO)—to favorably shape the civilian consciousness of those who seek to burden America’s national interests as defined though America’s Instruments of National Power (DIMEFLIP). In short there are no other interests in the world except for those that favor the United States of America. And that is stated as plain as day in President Obama’s National Security Strategy of the USA, “The United States will protect its people and advance our prosperity irrespective of the actions of any other nation...”

What clearer statement of audacity or of Empire does one need? With this in mind, the Snowden revelations transmitted through The Guardian (UK), Der Spiegel (Germany) and El Globo (Brazil) do not nearly move to the level of shock and awe. With an informed knowledge of the relevant history, one would expect this activity from the Lord Protector of the United States Republic, President Obama.

The immediate threat, as it has been throughout Western history, to the status quo is how to prevent 85 percent of the public from realizing that their collective role amounts to little more than stage hands (voters, consumers) and stunt doubles (soldiers, intelligence operators) that allow the great actors (politicians, military leaders, academics, corporate bosses, legacy journalists) to flit across the global stage armed with the tools of egotistical of noblesse obliges to stop, or start, the next act in human suffering—maybe even one that may involve American lives. These individuals would become cannibals to maintain their respective positions of power. Do we not have enough to fix in the USA? Can we divert at least some small portion of the national security budget to American education, dying cities, hungry and homeless people? Can some of the corporate loopholes be closed?

Pat Buchanan of the very readable American Conservative put it best. “This is thus their [Egypt’s] problem, not ours, most Americans believe, and our influence is receding there, even as that of the British, French and Russians did before us. Let them work it out. Testifying to this truth is the tape of Secretary of State John Kerry inspecting his yacht off Nantucket as the Egyptian regime fell, and Obama, after a brief National Security Council conclave, heading off for the golf course on the July 4 weekend, then on to Camp David.”
Assuming the United States national security apparatus can collect and analyze the thoughts, conversations, strategies and tactics of its own leaders/citizens, and nation states, transnational enterprises the world over, what are the implications for Western representative democracies (fragile prospects anyway)? With worldwide anti-austerity protests increasing each year, there is much for yacht owners like John Kerry to worry about. Controlling the citizen rabble by homogenizing them via uniformed dress, divining their thoughts--and potential revolts—and filling their minds with ideological or consumerist propaganda is something that Thomas More thought about long ago in his work *Utopia*.

Can Western corporate nation states, led by the American national security and money printing machinery, homogenize and reshape citizenry to adapt to a collective and individual life of austerity? As the nation state like the USA is stripped clean of any powers save those of national security and the servicing and protection of commerce, who or what center of gravity holds the States of the Union together? Is the US national and corporate machinery—with the assistance of media, academia and cultural leaders---now in a position to fit an American president with the mask of all seeing divine monarch?

And if the Americans have the dirt and thoughts on everyone in their own country (credit scores, medical procedures, party affiliation, sexual orientation, habits, travel) what is the point of the false dram of elections other than an elaborate charade? Does diplomacy matter anymore? With full spectrum knowledge attained by American’s, what is negotiation, treaty or summit other than a theatrical production? And what becomes of opinion and identity? Who is one really but what one consumes from what society, the “Other”, provides? Just where is that information floating in the electromagnetic spectrum coming from and why is it there?

Fomenting social tyranny in order to get “ thinkers“ to comply with the narrative of the moment becomes a simple task it seems. One can hear it: “Did you hear about that statement in the court room drama on CNN? Nope, did not. What’s wrong with you, don’t you watch TV? Did you at least see the article in the Post or the Times? Nope, did not. Then how can you know what you are talking about?”

So what could be done with a database that housed the lives of a generation of domestic and foreign citizens, say from age 18-56, and was analyzed some years hence using supercomputing machinery and software programs that would provide predictable pattern analysis for the control of an entire society? Match that treasure trove of information with oncoming revolutions in evolutionary psychology, genetic engineering and pharmaceuticals (on the latter see *Insatiability* by S. Witkiewicz and Murti-Bing pills) and the formula for the redesign of humanity, and the utopian dream of a managed society, will be realized. That development may be a necessity. The way the human species is destroying itself and the Earth there may likely be no other choice. Living on another planet in current evolutionary form is not an option. Perhaps the human animal is evolution’s idea of a joke.

But wait! This just in!
Sources report that a new American interstellar space probe known under the code name Lancelot Link Wind (LLW) will be launched in the hopes of defending the Earth from an alien invasion. The spacecraft with its dark matter propulsion system is designed like the black granite monolith in Stanley Kubrick’s movie 2001: A Space Odyssey. Inside the monolith lives an aquatic resident cyber database known as Submariner Clapper (SC) and consists of a mix of video, audio, text, and pictures of six billion human beings collected over a ten year period. According to a member of the Beyond the Director of National Intelligence (BDNIC), “We recognize here at BDNIC that there is a chance that LLW [Lancelot Link Wind] may float around in space forever. It may not even make it out of the damn solar system! But we have our EIM [Earth in Mind] here. Do you remember that scene in 2001 when everyone is jumping around the monolith screaming and throwing bones in the air? Well, we figure that if an alien species finds LLW and activates the SC, and listens in, it’ll drive em *%^#@! crazy and they’ll avoid this watering hole forever. After all, we have no greater mission than the protection of the American people and some other people too.”

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