

What it means to live in a surveillance society

'To be at liberty is to be free from suspicion'

THE OVERTON WINDOW



ERESH OMAR JAMAL

If you said pre-2013...that the most private moments of your lives were being watched and recorded...people would call you a conspiracy theorist." — Edward Snowden

Six years have passed since former CIA contractor Edward Snowden blew the whistle revealing numerous global surveillance programmes run by the US National Security Agency (NSA) and the Five Eyes Intelligence Alliance involving the US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. Informing people across the globe that the world they are living in far exceeds the frightening dystopia George Orwell described in his prophetic novel *1984*.

With the spread of advanced technology, and as civilisation merges with the Internet, it is no longer about which governments are doing the spying, because all of them are, to whatever extent they can, which itself is kept secret using the excuse of "national security". And so are various private organisations, many of whom are developing surveillance systems specifically to service governments.

One such Israeli organisation, known as the NSO Group, developed a programme called Pegasus, which a Canadian group of academic researchers, known as Citizen Lab, discovered on the phones of journalist Jamal Khashoggi's associates right before he was murdered. According to Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, "agents apparently linked to the Saudi regime" had also "used spy technology from Israeli firm NSO Group Technologies to eavesdrop on a Saudi dissident in Canada." Citizen Lab further revealed that similar technologies have been used around the world not only against

journalists, but even their children.

For the surveillance industry, the product is you and the story of your life, says Snowden. "It is the people that you care about, and who mean the most to you; it is the ideas that attract you and the things that repel you; it is a system designed to put your mind on a shelf with a price tag, available to anyone who has got the money" to pay for it. Hence, the business model of the surveillance industry is the commercialisation of public insecurity, which he explains is the biggest cyber-security risk that the world faces today in this science-fiction-like society we are living in, but with real-life consequences that affect us all and are reshaping human civilisation.

We are currently in the midst of the "greatest redistribution of power since the industrial revolution. Because everyone, from bureaucrats, judges and even private individuals, is working to compile *perfect records of private lives*." Aware of the fact that they are constantly being watched. Living in fear that the tiniest aspects of their lives can at any time be used against them as society increasingly abandons the idea that being imperfect human beings, we are all entitled to make at least a few mistakes.

We live "in the assumption that every sound" we make is "overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinised," as Orwell predicted. And even more terrifyingly, it seems nothing right now is able to get in

the way or slow down our gallop towards becoming a society under constant and total surveillance—if we aren't there already.

As a result, the power wielded by those who have access to such information extends beyond all imagination. Using their vast knowledge about each individual, they can pretty much get anyone to do anything they want, and ensure that any opposition to the existing power structure is quickly and most effectively neutralised—which means that this power structure ends up assuming a life of its own, self-perpetuating its own existence, starting from monitoring us, to predicting us, to then influencing and acting against us. After all, as has happened repeatedly throughout history, even the best intentions among those in government (or nearly all hierarchical structures) inevitably give way to the desire to maintain power and control over the citizenry, at all costs. Usually beginning with the suppression of free speech and free thought which cannot materialise in the first place without privacy, as surely, when we are aware that we are being watched and listened to, our thought pattern is bound to change along with the contents of our speech.

According to American journalist Jacob Appelbaum, who was a core member of the Tor project, not only do people who are aware that they are being constantly watched and judged form something called a "double consciousness"—an oppressed state of mind—but they are no longer free. That is because one who is being surveilled all the time is always under suspicion, whereas "to be at liberty is to be free from suspicion." And if we are "not free from suspicion when we are innocent, then we aren't free" at all.

Therefore, what total surveillance of populations does is make people fear each other as well as make them shift from being innocent until proven guilty, to effectively

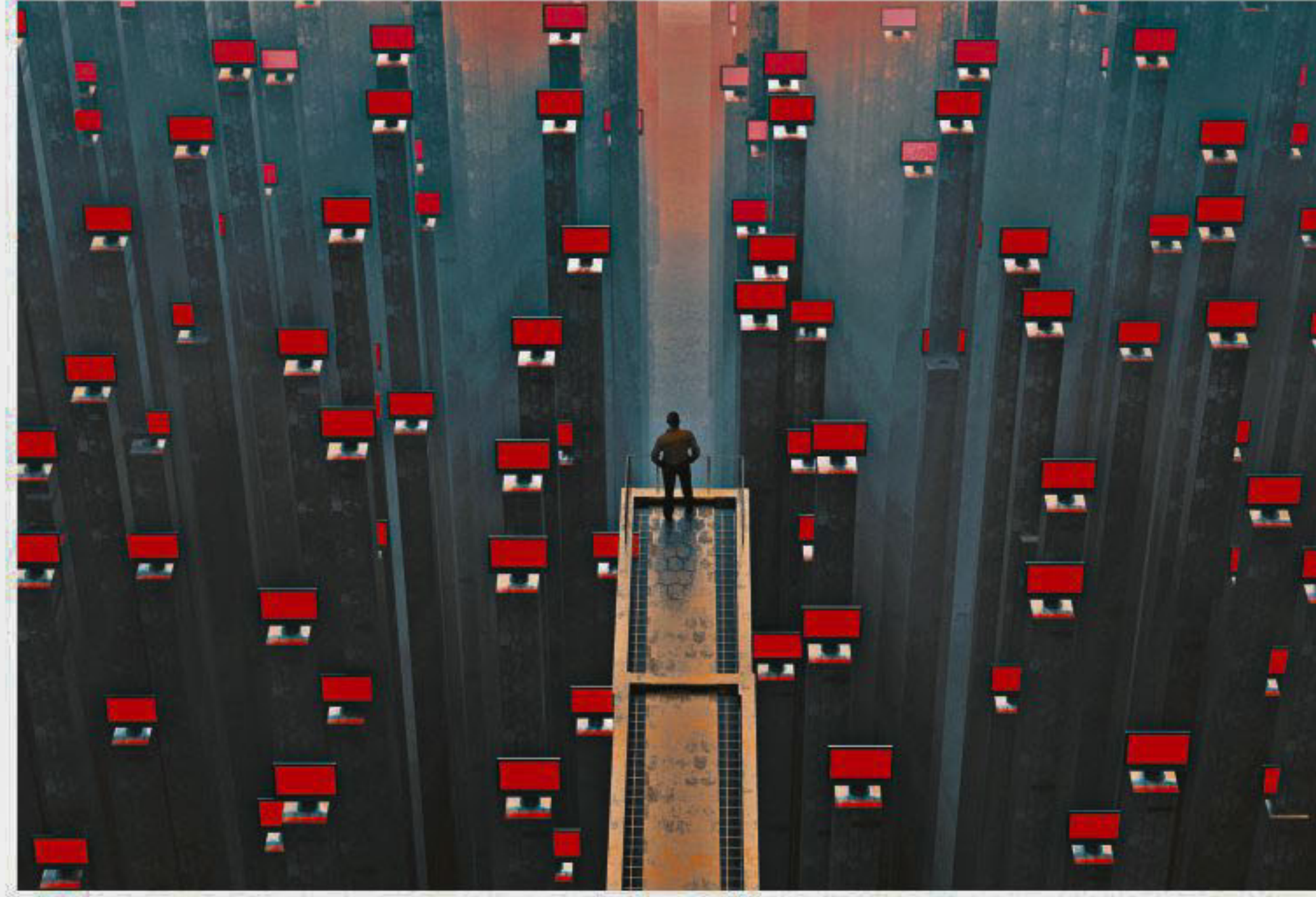
being guilty until proven innocent—as once one's life is combed through in such fine detail, we are, ultimately, all guilty of something.

Only under conditions of total surveillance, that guilt becomes a means of control at the hands of those who have access to our data. And who also have the power to manipulate and portray that data however they wish—that is, create a reality of their choosing using the information that they have on us.

As the surveillance of every individual becomes transnational and even global in scope, there are a number of very important questions that people everywhere desperately need to ask: do we wish to be free from other people thinking they understand us, having seen some data about us? Do we want people to think they know who we really are just by looking at our digital data-trail? Or does being human make us more than that? And if it does, then doesn't the direction that we are heading towards reduce us to something much less—like a perfectly regimented population of uniform individuals who have lost all their individuality, which arguably is the most important imperfection that makes us human?

Finally, given the realities and results of what it's like to be watched 24/7 and listened to, as described by Orwell and others, do we really want to live in a surveillance society? Because if we do not, or cannot freely ask such questions now, then this last message of Orwell's was perhaps one of the few that he did not leave for us, but had again prophetically sent on our behalf: "To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another...From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink—greetings!"

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

End of ideological convergence threatens economic convergence

ARVIND SUBRAMANIAN and JOSH FELMAN

FOR an all-too-brief period between the late 1980s and the late 2000s, the world was characterised by convergence, both ideological and economic. The West and the Rest agreed that an open liberal order was the best way to increase prosperity. Now, however, this ideological order threatens to unravel, with adverse consequences for the world economy.

The two-decade-long "golden age" was one of trade hyper-globalisation, reflected in an unprecedented increase in the ratio of world exports to GDP. It was also an era of economic convergence—for the first time in centuries, living standards in a broad cross-section of developing countries started catching up with advanced-economy indicators. Moreover, globalisation and convergence were handmaidens—open markets enabled developing countries to prosper by building modern, efficient, export-based industries. And no country benefited more from hyper-globalisation than China.

The liberal order underpinning this era was largely created by the United States. Exactly 75 years ago, when both the economic turmoil of the 1930s and World War II were fresh in the collective consciousness, the US was able and willing to supply three vital global public goods through the postwar institutions created at Bretton Woods. Emergency finance would come from the International Monetary Fund, and long-term lending from the World Bank. Above all, open markets would flourish under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (and its successor, the World Trade Organization). It was a G1 world, and America was the unchallenged hegemon.

Today, we have neither a G1 world nor ideological convergence. Because of its spectacular growth since 1978, China has become the second dominant economic power alongside the US (Europe is still too decentralised and beset with internal problems to wield strategic influence). And the consensus about what constitutes good economics has broken down.

In the West, and especially the US, a series of negative economic trends—including slower growth, rising inequality, declining mobility, and greater concentration of economic power—have called into question the benefits of globalisation. In addition, the 2008 global financial crisis and its aftermath have undermined faith in

American-style capitalism.

China's rise to power, and the perceived consequences for America, have also stoked US scepticism about globalisation. A broad swath of US elite and public opine that China has abused America's largesse, via currency manipulation, intellectual-property theft and espionage, and forced technology transfer. Furthermore, China's recent tilt toward statism and political repression adds to a broader US sense of betrayal, and of an investment in shared prosperity, that has gone badly wrong.

This discordant G2 world and the end of ideological convergence now threaten economic

decoupling between the West and the Rest. The G2 of China and the US, instead of supplying the key global public goods of open markets that the economic historian Charles Kindleberger saw as the responsibility of hegemony, is now providing global public "bads."

As the US and China impose tariffs and trade restrictions on each other's goods, and as the US undermines multilateral trade rules and institutions, world trade is slowing markedly, threatening developing countries' export sectors and the viability of their overall development strategies. At the same time, the US and other Western governments are clamping down on

a hobbled hegemon, having become dominant without acquiring genuine international appeal. Undemocratic and repressive, the country lacks the "soft power" that would give it the additional legitimacy to assert its dominance—effective leadership, after all, requires willing followership.

Moreover, hegemony needs to provide open markets. Yet China is not offering enough export opportunities for poorer countries, even though it previously benefited greatly from deeper trade links with more advanced economies. The Chinese government's recent turn toward self-sufficiency and promoting domestic champions is contributing to the rapid decline in the country's imports.

To be clear, China is entitled to pursue a development strategy that has aided its extraordinary rise. But the country cannot be a benevolent hegemon if it insists on maintaining a protectionist stance that deprives the global system—and other developing countries—of key public goods.

The US-dominated G1 world is long gone, and the G2 system in which the US and China shared hegemonic responsibilities is now fading into memory. Instead, we live in a *G-Mimus-2* world in which the two hegemony, instead of providing the Kindleberger global public goods of cooperation, are doing exactly the opposite.

Understandably, developing countries have begun to ask some pointed questions. What will happen to the global economic system? Will the current system last long enough to enable us to prosper? How will we weather the next round of global turbulence? And does it even make sense to talk about cooperation when the two leading global protagonists are undermining multilateralism and the institutions that sustain it?

Consumed by their quarrel, the US and China have so far provided no answers to these questions. There is an old African proverb that says, "When the elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers." Right now, the rest of the world is very afraid.

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convergence, and thus developing countries' prospects. The "golden age" of convergence had, in any case, already started to face headwinds. First, climate change poses risks to developing countries' agricultural sector. Problems in this sector will reverberate throughout these economies, because high and rising agricultural productivity has been the key to successful structural transformations from farming to manufacturing. In addition, the spread of technology-enabled automation is replacing unskilled labour with machines, directly threatening the ability of poorer countries to lift incomes through labour-intensive manufacturing. But the biggest threat comes from an ideological

migration. As a result, developing countries are boxed in, and will find it increasingly difficult to export their products or their excess labour. American repudiation of the Paris climate agreement does not bode well for the poorer countries who will bear the brunt of the consequences of global warming.

That situation is dire enough. But perhaps the most critical "bads" provided by the US and China are the most subtle. America's unilateral measures, which flout the global rules that it helped to devise, have begun to damage the Bretton Woods institutions and the associated system of international cooperation. China, meanwhile, is

QUOTABLE Quote



MARY FRANCES BERRY (b. 1938) AMERICAN HISTORIAN

When you have police officers who abuse citizens, you erode public confidence in law enforcement. That makes the job of good police officers unsafe.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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|----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| ACROSS | 32 Head honcho | 11 Back |
| 1 Beach creature | 34 Like gymnasts | 15 Bun worn on the head |
| 5 Stepped down | 37 Black Russian ingredient | 19 Miseries |
| 9 Music's Abdul | 38 Tricks | 20 Golfer Trevino |
| 10 Pay tribute to | 39 Staggering | 22 Unexpected problem |
| 12 Knight's wear | 40 Brooklyn team | 23 Had a snack |
| 13 Visibly stunned | 41 Telescope part | 24 Tom Cruise movie |
| 14 Formal head-wear | | 25 Poker announcement |
| 16 School org. | DOWN | 26 Enrage |
| 17 Singer Fitzgerald | 1 Singer King | 27 Conjures up |
| 18 More unctuous | 2 Scrunch up | 28 Permitted |
| 21 Look upon | 3 Island greeting | 29 Dread |
| 22 Ill humor | 4 Vamp Theda | 30 Future fungus |
| 23 Low joint | 5 Cry of insight | 33 Egg outline |
| 24 Giants of myth | 6 Lumber unit | 35 Rent out |
| 26 Singer Torme | 7 Site of nursery rhyme blackbirds | 36 Snaky shape |
| 29 Precede | 8 Critic's annual list | |
| 30 Rescue | 9 Party spreads | |
| 31 MPG-rating org. | | |

YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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C	L	I	P	S	A	V	A	S
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S	T	O	N	E	W	A	L	L
R	O	C	K	O	P	E	R	A
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S	T	Y	L	E	C	E	L	T

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott



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