



If You Want Security, Pursue Liberty

Judging by his prime-time speech last week, the final year of Barack Obama's presidency will be marked by increased militarism abroad and authoritarianism at home. The centerpiece of the president's speech was his demand for a new law forbidding anyone on the federal government's terrorist watch list from purchasing a firearm. There has never been a mass shooter who was on the terrorist watch list, so this proposal will not increase security. However, it will decrease liberty.



Federal officials can have an American citizen placed on the terrorist watch list based solely on their suspicions that the individual might be involved in terrorist activity. Individuals placed on the list are not informed that they have been labeled as suspected terrorists, much less given an opportunity to challenge that designation, until a Transportation Security Administration agent stops them from boarding a plane.

Individuals can be placed on the list if their Facebook or Twitter posts seem "suspicious" to a federal agent. You can also be placed on the list if your behavior somehow suggests that you are a "representative" of a terrorist group (even if you have no associations with any terrorist organizations). Individuals can even be put on the list because the FBI wants to interview them about friends or family members!

Thousands of Americans, including several members of Congress and many employees of the Department of Homeland Security, have been mistakenly placed on the terrorist watch list. Some Americans are placed on the list because they happen to have the same names as terrorist suspects. Those mistakenly placed on the terrorist watch list must go through a lengthy "redress" process to clear their names.

It is likely that some Americans are on the list solely because of their political views and activities. Anyone who doubts this should consider the long history of federal agencies, such as the IRS and the FBI, using their power to harass political movements that challenge the status quo. Are the American people really so desperate for the illusion of security that they will support a law that results in some Americans losing their Second Amendment rights because of a bureaucratic error or because of their political beliefs?

President Obama is also preparing an executive order expanding the federal background check system. Expanding background checks will not keep guns out of the hands of criminals or terrorists. However, it



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will make obtaining a firearm more difficult for those needing, for example, to defend themselves against abusive spouses.

Sadly, many who understand that new gun control laws will leave us less free and less safe support expanding the surveillance state. Like those promoting gun control, people calling for expanded surveillance do not let facts deter their efforts to take more of our liberties. There is no evidence that mass surveillance has prevented even one terrorist attack.

France's mass surveillance system is much more widespread and intrusive than ours. Yet it failed to prevent the recent attacks. France's gun control laws, which are much more restrictive than ours, not only failed to keep guns out of the hands of their attackers, they left victims defenseless. It is thus amazing that many American politicians want to make us more like France by taking away our Second and Fourth Amendment rights.

Expanding government power will not increase our safety; it will only diminish our freedom. Americans will have neither liberty nor security until they abandon the fantasy that the US government can provide economic security, personal security, and global security.

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