



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on June 25, 2009

Satellite Spying on Americans

Apparently not.

The story is about how “Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano killed a program begun by the Bush administration that would use U.S. spy satellites for domestic security and law enforcement.” The article quotes Congresswoman Jane Harman, who chairs the Homeland Security Intelligence Subcommittee, saying of the program: “I thought this was just an invitation to huge mischief... It shows real leadership on the part of Janet Napolitano.”



Sounds good for your privacy, right? Wrong. The satellite surveillance of Americans by the federal government will continue apace; it's just that the local police are being cut out of the loop. Obama's government wants the ability to spy on you all to himself and other federal officials, without any pesky state and local officials examining the evidence. In other words, the Obama administration is trying to centralize information.

The *Washington Post's* [headline](#), “DHS to Cut Police Access to Spy-Satellite Data,” was more accurate, even if their story gave scant indication that the domestic surveillance program would continue under federal auspices.

The money quote of [Napolitano's press statement about ending the program](#), called the National Applications Office, is this: “NAO was established to facilitate access to satellite imagery for homeland security and law enforcement purposes. The NAO Charter formally established NAO as a part of DHS in February 2008. Secretary Napolitano's decision will not affect the ability of the Department or its state, local and tribal partners to use satellite imaging as currently allowed under existing policy in order to meet its many other responsibilities.” Domestic satellite surveillance of Americans will continue under this decision. It's just that the federal government will decide how it is rationed.

Most of the press coverage of the decision creates the impression that the Obama-Napolitano DHS is slaying an evil surveillance office created by the Bush administration and nearly ready to go on-line. The [Wall Street Journal reported](#) near the top of its story: “The Bush administration had taken preliminary steps to launch the office, such as acquiring office space and beginning to hire staff. The plans to shutter the office signal Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano's decision to refocus the department's intelligence on ensuring that state and local officials get the threat information they need, the official said.” So the program just had a vague plan and had opened up offices in a few strip malls? Hardly.



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The *Washington Post* [reported](#) that the federal government was heavily invested in the satellite surveillance program. “I have concerns we’re not fully utilizing legal and lawfully authorized capabilities of the U.S. government, capabilities for which U.S. taxpayers paid over decades hundreds of billions of dollars,” Charlie Allen, a Bush-era DHS chief intelligence officer [told the Post](#).

Hundreds of billions of dollars for surveillance. Janet Napolitano wasn’t about to pull the plug on that kind of “investment,” and she didn’t. She’s still going “to use satellite imaging as currently allowed under existing policy in order to meet its many other responsibilities.” As the *Wall Street Journal* [summarized](#), “She also wants to make the department the central point in the government for receiving and analyzing terrorism tips from around the country, the official added.”

Terrorism, yes. But don’t forget that Janet Napolitano herself [said](#) that the DHS has “many other responsibilities.”

Photo of Janet Napolitano: AP Images



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