



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on September 18, 2018

Massachusetts State Police Tweet Proof of Surveillance of Activists

Activism by individuals from any point on the political spectrum is becoming the scene of mass surveillance by law enforcement.

In Massachusetts, a police department accidentally tweeted out its program of keeping watch over certain political groups operating in the area.

Thursday night, Boston was the scene of several explosions caused by highly pressurized gas lines owned by Columbia Gas. Massachusetts State Police in Beantown sent safety updates via Twitter, informing residents of the fires and the efforts to evacuate the population and control the conflagrations.



Of course, that's the sort of tweet one would expect to be sent by police at a time of potential harm to the public. As such, that part of the tweet wasn't controversial in the least. In fact, the tweet even included a map of fires and the location of first responders.

The map whose image was included was a picture of a computer screen and on that screen several browser tabs were visible. Those tabs revealed more than just law enforcement's emergency response information. It included groups on whom the cops were keeping tabs.

Here's the summary of the contents of the tabs, as reported by *The Guardian*:

The bookmarks included a Facebook group for Mass Action Against Police Brutality (MAAPB); the Coalition to Organize and Mobilize Boston Against Trump (Combat); Facebook 413; Facebook MA Activism; and Resistance Calendar, which notes timings for canvassing for Democratic or progressive candidates and anti-Trump rallies.

Within 30 minutes, police realized their unwitting revelation and cropped the browser tabs out of the photo attached to the tweet.

Thirty minutes was enough time, though, for organizations appearing on the bookmarks and journalists to notice and retweet the original photo, beginning a debate about the proper limits of state-run surveillance.

The state police denied the implications of the screenshot, including the notion that they kept activists under surveillance.

"We do not collect information about — nor, frankly, do we care about — any group's beliefs or opinions," David Procopio, the state police director of media communications told *The Guardian*.

Procopio added that the State Police did have a "responsibility to know about all large public gatherings of any type and by any group, regardless of their purpose and position, for public safety reasons."



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There are many Bostonians who may consider such surveillance acceptable, even desirable. After all, the organizations apparently being tracked by the state police are Leftist to say the least.

Unfortunately, the Constitution does not distinguish between Right and Left in its protection of fundamental rights.

In fact, the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution explicitly extends its protection to “people”:

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Massachusetts State Police aren’t the only ones taking advantage of technology to track individuals and groups. Law-enforcement agencies across the country are receiving federal grant money to rapidly ramp up their ability to deploy sophisticated surveillance apparatuses.

The federal Department of Homeland Security offers billions in taxpayer dollars to local and state law enforcement in the form of grants awarded for the purchase of sophisticated surveillance equipment, including perhaps the most pernicious and potentially threatening to liberty: facial recognition software.

From license plate readers to facial-recognition software, from surveillance cameras to cellphone signal trackers, the Department of Homeland Security is providing police with all the gadgets, hardware, and software necessary to keep everybody under surveillance, without the targeted public ever realizing that it’s the Capital, not the cops, that are behind the monitoring.

The technology employed in these devices is astonishingly advanced. For example, a facial-recognition product in use by social-media giant Facebook — as well as by dozens of law-enforcement agencies nationwide — is so advanced it sounds almost like science fiction.

Using a “nine-layer deep neural network,” the software known as DeepFace uses “more than 120 million parameters” to recreate the user’s face and then scans millions of photos to match the face to the person.

The ability of cash-strapped local law-enforcement agencies to deploy such sophisticated software depends on the largesse of the federal DHS.

According to a report issued by the DHS to Congress, between the fiscal years 2008 and 2014, the DHS doled out more than \$9.4 billion in assistance for the fighting of “terrorism” at home.

Coincidentally, law-enforcement agencies in Massachusetts recently received a generous grant from the federal surveillance state’s coffers.

As reported by [masslive.com](#) in May:

Massachusetts could receive more than \$30 million in federal grant funding to help state and local officials improve their ability to prevent, protect against and respond to terrorist attacks and major disasters, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

The allocations, which are among a total of \$1.7 billion available nationally, call for \$5.4 million for Massachusetts in State Homeland Security Program grants, \$17.5 million for Boston in Urban Area Security Initiative grants, \$250,000 for local organizations through the Nonprofit Security Grant Program, and \$7 million for the state in Emergency Management Performance grants.



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That the federal funds would be used to keep close watch on activist groups (assuming they are threats to “public safety” as David Procopio said) was all but admitted by DHS Secretary Kristjen Nielsen in her statement announcing the awarding of the grant.

“The DHS grant programs are flexible by design and will be used to help address evolving threats,” Nielsen said.

There is no threat evolving more rapidly than the threat to constitutionally protected liberty posed by the police state and the surveillance technology it possesses.

What is the answer to the growing federal surveillance dragnet and the disturbing trend among local government to help pull it into new corners of coverage?

Americans must exercise their natural sovereignty and demand that local law enforcement seek legislative permission before participating in any surveillance program, and the people must hold lawmakers accountable for their adherence to their oaths of office, particularly the part relating to upholding the Constitution.



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