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Government's Use of Tech Surveillance Walks Fine Line

As the U.S. Air Force develops a cyberspace command and the intelligence community launches a Wiki, privacy rights may suffer.

By Brad King

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We live in a very different world than we did five years ago.

Ubiquitous personal technology, fueled by the dotcom explosion, radically transformed much of our world into a digital hub. Our lives are now conducted online, and almost every device—from an iPod to the Pontiac Vibe—comes packed with computer chips and processing power.

For a short period in the late nineties and early aughts, it seemed as if that digital society would open up new doors and connect us in ways we could never have imagined.

And then came 9/11. The horrific events of that day radically restructured how Americans viewed the world. Safety and security were no longer taken for granted. We convinced ourselves—rightly or wrongly—that our need for protection outweighed, in some cases, our need for certain freedoms we'd taken for granted.



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The rise of this digital technology smashed against our immediate desire to protect ourselves, creating an uncomfortable dance with personal networks and government security.

And yet it's hard to argue that in a post-9/11 world, the U.S. government's move into cyberspace hasn't, at least on the surface, made sense.

and computing networks.

The Air Force announcement comes on the heels of the intelligence community's private Wikipedia, which enables a variety of intelligence sources to quickly edit and update information on suspected terrorist activities, according to this [Wired News story](#).

The office of U.S. intelligence czar John Negroponte announced Intellipedia, which allows intelligence analysts and other officials to collaboratively add and edit content on the government's classified Intelink Web much like its more famous namesake on the world wide web.

Protecting our networked infrastructures and using technology to ease communication are two no-brainer goals.

However, the issue for some is that once the government gets its hands on some information, it's going to want more.

Privacy advocates have continuously warned a sometimes apathetic public that the increase in tracking technologies—from cameras along roadways to cookie-tracking Web technologies—would eventually lead us into a world where personal privacies are eroded.

According to this [Reuters story](#), Richard Thomas, who oversees privacy concerns for the British government, said that citizens have placed too much blind faith in corporations and governments, which continue to collect more data.

“Two years ago I warned that we were in danger of sleepwalking into a surveillance society. Today I fear that we are in fact waking up to a surveillance society that is already all around us,” Thomas said.

Thomas went on to say that governments are pushing to collect more information from credit-card purchases, mobile-phone use, and travel itineraries, according to this [BBC story](#).

Beyond the tracking technologies, privacy advocates worry that too many companies are outsourcing projects to foreign countries. This could open up holes in domestic networks, which can be much more easily exploited by hostile groups, according to this [Business Week article](#). **T**



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