

"They That Can Give Up Essential Liberty To Obtain A Little Temporary Safety Deserve Neither Liberty Nor Safety". Benjamin Franklin

Or How We Kept Our Liberty And Achieved Almost Total Security

Dear Son:

You have asked me to help with background information for your school project on how we overcame the terrorist menace of almost two decades ago. Let me begin by saying it was not easy and the jury is still out on whether in the end the price was worth paying.

It all started, before you were born, on that terrible morning in September 01. I still vividly remember the horror and disbelief I felt as I watched repeat after repeat of those planes hitting the twin towers. One or two short wars later, we thought we had overcome the terrorist menace and went back to business as usual. Then, the terrible bio-events of 07 when more than fifty thousand people died. That was the last straw and serious action had to be taken.

Initially governments wanted to control access to chemicals, scientific information and most laboratory equipment. They wanted additional powers of arrest and suspension of many individual rights including *habeas corpus*. After the initial panic, when sanity returned, opinion makers focussed on Lord Acton's "Liberty is not a means to a higher political end. It is the ultimate political end". We then resolved to maintain our liberties and pay any other price to achieve security. I am still amazed that when faced with extreme adversity, people somehow collectively come to the right decision.

Enough of that. For your project you need hard facts on how we solved our dilemma. In a word, technology. We used technology to put the most complete and pervasive surveillance system ever conceived. This system has three physical components; smart wireless implants, ubiquitous readers and a global database continuously mined by powerful artificial intelligence programs. The two other components that complete the picture are the financial component and the safeguards one. Let me now cover each of these without going into much technical detail.

We all have smart wireless implants that provide the ultimate identification mechanism. All implants are unique and use the latest encryption technology. They are identified by being sent a challenge random number that they process and send back a response. The UN Global Security Organisation (UNGSO) computers verify this response in real time. Most of us, with the possible exception of some living in isolated communities, can be positively and automatically identified at will. You probably know that unauthorised removal of an implant is a serious offence in all countries. You may not know that unique sections of a person's DNA sequence are digitally encoded and stored in the UNGSO database. A person can now be positively identified if need be even if "officially" issued with a replacement implant under an assumed identity.

The second component is the networked system of readers in almost all public places and many private ones. If you go shopping, visit a government office, eat at a restaurant, ride in a car, use a mobile phone or even stay at home, your implant is being

interrogated and verified as well as the implants of other people within range. That information is instantaneously captured by the same UNGSO computers. What you buy, whom you meet, where you go and what Supernet sites you browse are captured and can be reconstructed. Don't try to remove your implant because if a reader cannot get a valid response an alarm is immediately generated in the nearest security office and you will probably be under arrest within minutes.

The third physical component is the cluster of UNGSO computers and the associated powerful artificial intelligence programs. All data thus captured, is continuously analysed and permanently stored. Patterns of suspicious behaviour are identified and further automatic checks are carried out. As a last resort that information is then made available to one of the law enforcement agencies for further investigation or action. If one person of a terrorist organisation is identified, the reconstruction back in time of his every action will normally allow the identification and apprehending of all members. With this level of surveillance the need to restrict freedoms because of the fear of terrorism had disappeared. Of course, rigorous safeguards and controls were put in place to minimise abuse. I will discuss these later on. Sadly, some undemocratic countries still curtail freedoms but this has nothing to do with counter-terrorism.

Needless to say, this is very expensive and I am sure your teachers will want you to say something about how we managed to pay for it. Here, the marketplace came into action. Governments, companies, entrepreneurs and many others realised the marketing and cost-saving opportunities that are possible with such a global network. The fees they pay for access to certain parts of it not only cover the cost but also occasionally provide the UN with a handy profit, which it then uses for its many developmental programs. I will not list those parties who are paying for the system. What I will do is mention three typical scenarios and leave it to you, as a further exercise, to identify some of them.

At the supermarket checkout, Jane Citizen's implant has been verified, items she bought were scanned and read by the store's computer and Jane pressed a button to choose how she is paying for the purchase. The serial number of the new tablet computer she just bought was also captured and an electronic warranty card automatically sent to the manufacturer.

When she arrived home, she found her flat broken into and the diamond necklace she inherited from her grandmother missing. Her insurance company arranged for a list of all people who were in the vicinity of the flat in the last few hours to be printed at the local police station. An hour later, the necklace was recovered and a young man is helping the police with their enquiries.

Later that night, Jane meets some of her friends at the local entertainment complex. As they walk through the door they are automatically directed to the window that has their preferred fast food order ready. By the time they picked up their food, one of the virtual reality theatres has already downloaded the latest adventure that none of them has played before.

Son, your school project will not be complete without a mention of the safeguards we have implemented to enhance the effectiveness of the system and to reduce the potential of its abuse. First, all member countries of the UN were required to install a national system and to link it to the computers of UNGSO. Automatic sanctions were imposed on countries that somehow disrupted the flow of data to the UNGSO or did not keep their

national networks running at full efficiency. I am not sure about all the details of who can access the global data, but I will write the basics. I believe that any law enforcement agency can ask a question like who was in the vicinity of location x at time y within their area of jurisdiction. A complete profile on an individual has to be requested by a competent judge in the country of which he is a citizen and subject to agreement and vetting by the UN watchdog committee. A full anti-terrorist investigation spanning many individuals and data from across the globe needs to be requested by the representative of two permanent and two non-permanent members of the Security Council. Of course if the system automatically discovers a suspicious pattern, UNGSO staff are alerted and further action can be taken. I have heard rumours, unsubstantiated at this time, that an intelligence agency of a superpower has broken the encryption scheme of the system and can run their own profiles, but this is beyond the scope of your school project.

In your summary, son, I think you need to put in a paragraph or two about your personal views of the above developments. On the plus side you may want to mention how much safer we feel today by the demise of the terrorist threat, how much safer our streets are now that muggers and burglars are almost always arrested within hours of their acts. Do not forget to mention the extra convenience of not having to carry cash, credit cards or any forms of identification on us. I hesitate to say this to you, but another unexpected benefit is that a lot of people my age are becoming more tolerant of the actions of young people. It seems they fear an accidental publication of the records of what they themselves had done when they were young. This makes them less prone to strong condemnation of other people. On the minus side, there is the loss of the right to privacy and the potential of abuse. I do not think you can ignore this huge loss.

My own thoughts on the matter are that I am not overly concerned that a computer in the basement of UNGSO knows more about me than I remember myself. I will be concerned if a human were to see this information. However, as I do not expect I am part of any anti-terror investigation, no human has access to my records and my privacy is somewhat protected. I know I may be deluding myself here. On balance though, I do not believe we had any choice if we wanted to avoid a repeat of the events of 07. Whether I like it or not, we did what we had to do.

I will finish with this quotation by Thomas Jefferson; "The price of freedom is eternal vigilance".

Please write and let me know how your project went.

Dad.