

While we may not all have jet packs or live in a Blade Runner's world, China's Communist regime has already taken us closer and closer to "1984," George Orwell's dystopian nightmare.

Constant and pervasive surveillance is now the new normal in China. Just consider the following developments:

Unmanned drones patrol over cities.

Satellites track cars and trucks on the roads.

Cameras on lamp posts with artificial intelligence (AI) read pedestrian faces and analyze their gait, as the information is scanned almost instantly against vast databases to determine the loyalty of citizens to the regime.

Video cameras in the classroom ensure that teachers do not deviate from the Communist Party's line. Students wear uniforms with chips that lock in their location and even prevent them from dozing off.

Rural grid supervisors launch surveillance apps to watch every household in the village and report suspicious activities

The thought police use the Great Firewall and the Golden Shield to trawl the internet to block the flow of information they deem subversive and pro-actively shape public opinion with their own fake news.

Thought control

China has been a bastion of thought control dating back to the Mao era.

Today's total surveillance state evolved from China's "stability maintenance strategy," the seeds of which date back to the 1989 pro-democracy protests which ended in the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Huge sums have been spent during the past three decades importing and developing domestic capabilities in technologies that allow China to deploy its sophisticated network of population surveillance and control.

China's Weapons of Mass Surveillance

Citizen Power for China

While the world was paying little attention, China was working on the largest, most sophisticated, and most repressive total surveillance state beyond what Orwell could have imagined.

China's weapons of mass surveillance have demonstrated an ability to exert absolute control over populations, as evidenced by the mass detention in Xinjiang Province, where millions of ethnic Uighurs are locked up in concentration camps, subject to brainwashing and torture.

The rest are under 24/7 surveillance in their homes and communities.

How does the state manage to wield such control? Consider, first, its network of 4.6 million local Chinese Communist Party (CCP) organizations whose authority extends over some 89.6 million members.

The state apparatus completes the web with tens of millions of military and civilian police, armed militias, informants, online patrols, and an advanced and integrated digital surveillance system that ranges from geostationary orbit and lower orbit to atmosphere and ground.

The newly deployed digital surveillance system consists of three main platforms that target both cities and rural areas, each with its own capabilities.

Skynet uses a video surveillance system that can monitor and integrate information of surveilled subjects.

Safe-City is a massive and comprehensive urban security management system with both computerized and human components.

The Sharp-eyes system uses televisions, cell phones and other devices with apps to form a real-time surveillance network in rural areas, which feeds into Skynet and Safe-city, reminiscent of Orwell's telescreens.

According to the New York Times, these three surveillance platforms have already installed over 200 million cameras nationwide, with 400 million more to be installed before 2020.

Most of these cameras can quickly recognize faces and conduct gait analysis. We personally know Chinese activists who have been interrogated by the police and criminally punished after having their private messages and remarks read by these systems.

Permanency for totalitarian state

What is the goal of this surveillance? As with the ruling party in Orwell's Oceania, it is to secure permanency for the regime by eliminating any possibility of secret uprisings against it.

Since the beginning of Xi Jinping's rule, regime security has been a top priority, based on his belief that the internet and social media were loosening the party's control over the hearts and minds of the people. Declaring an ideological war, Xi has taken "stability maintenance" to a new level.

After perfecting the system domestically, China considered it ready for export. In 2015 China launched the \$200 billion Digital Silk Road project, a global surveillance system to complement its "One-Belt-One-Road" initiative.

Chinese companies such as Huawei, ZTE, CETC. and others are the core builders of the Digital Silk Road. The project has already resulted in internet shutdowns and arrests of dissidents in countries that include Zimbabwe, Venezuela, and Ecuador.

As it protects its one-party state, China's total surveillance is now helping to prop up dictators around the world. These regimes now have unique capabilities beyond the barrel of a gun to control their populations and perpetuate their power.

The United States and its allies must begin to disarm China of these weapons of mass surveillance by using every leverage point, including the threat of economic disengagement.

The Xi regime must be de-legitimized and held accountable for its crimes against humanity while the West supports a non-violent democratic transition in China. We cannot allow China to continue to use our dollars to build a global dystopia.

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