

No rethinking necessary

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The Nov. 12 front-page story headlined "U.S. warned it must rethink privacy" informed us that we Americans need to abandon our quaint notions of privacy and be prepared for the government to gather and maintain even more of our personal information.

So says Donald Kerr, deputy director of national intelligence.

When he says "rethink our privacy," what he's really saying is "rethink our Constitution" because it gets in his way. It means let's not get all hung up on our First Amendment right to free speech and our right to disagree with our government when we think it is wrong. Let's abandon the Fourth Amendment requirement that the government obtain a warrant before marching into our homes or wiretapping our phones or tracking our e-mails. Let's remove the requirements that we be informed of charges against us and that we have the right to contest when we are unjustly imprisoned.

Why do I think the deputy director means all this? Because the government has already done these things and now seeks to justify them and make them legal. So it sends out people like this to get us ready to accept these changes that will undermine our democracy.

Kerr's argument is that younger people list their favorite movies and bars on MySpace pages, so why can't the government start a file on us about our e-mails and phone conversations? This guy could be a publicist for al-Qaida. These are things terrorists want to impose on us, and he wants us to do them ourselves.

Certainly, we need to be aggressive about finding terrorists, and we can't be naive about how to do that. The way to get terrorists and protect our liberties is to have oversight by the courts and Congress (or by independent bodies), and to make information about these programs available in a way that does not undermine their effectiveness.

But this government has rejected such provisions. The deputy director thinks all this is OK. His answer is, "Just trust us." I don't think so.

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