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The Patriot Act and the Intelligence-Industrial Complex

By Con Psarras

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Poll

It is necessary to extend the USA Patriot Act to ensure against future terroristic attacks?

1. No, it shouldn't be extended without a more thorough debate on what it does and why it is needed.
2. The Patriot Act is too broad and intrudes too much on individual rights.
3. Yes, the importance of the law outweighs concerns over civil liberties.

SALT LAKE CITY -- The so-called USA Patriot Act is likely to remain law for another four years after a contentious debate in Congress, which gave rise to an unheard of alliance of left-leaning civil libertarians and right-leaning Tea Party Republicans.

Their common ground is anxiety over the very concept of a law that grants so much power to the government to secretly surveil the whole citizenry. Supporters of the Act have little to say in its favor, other than to warn that very bad things could happen if the law goes away.

The issue has split Utah's congressional delegation. Sen. Orrin Hatch supports extension, as Rep. Jim Matheson has in the past. Representatives Rob Bishop and Jason Chaffetz and Sen. Mike Lee oppose.

Hatch has served on the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and has presumably been privy to details over real threats the Patriot Act will help thwart. But, of course, he can't talk about them, so we don't

really know exactly what threats there are, how real they are and, as a result, we are hard-pressed to weigh the necessity of watering-down civil liberties to preserve homeland security.

In a nutshell chock-full of irony, we are gathering so much information, literally no one knows exactly what we know. The apparatus publishes 50,000 reports a year -- 137 a day, 5 every hour.

And that is the problem with the USA Patriot Act -- which, by the way, is the

result of a tortured act of acronym-ism. "USA PATRIOT" is short for "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism." It was passed in a hurry -- just 43 days after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks. Congress at the time had the foresight to sunset the law after four years. This will be the second time it has been extended -- begging the question of whether there will ever be a time when we can say the threat of domestic terrorism has been vanquished.

[Tea Party adherents](#) don't like the Big-Government/Big-Brother aspects of the law. Civil Libertarians [bemoan its deep intrusion](#) into Constitutional protections of speech, privacy and due process.

All of us should be concerned with the development of a gargantuan intelligence industry since the Act has been in effect.

The Washington Post's Pulitzer-Prize-winning investigative report called "[Top Secret America](#)" is a must-read account of the burgeoning growth of intelligence agencies and activity in the last decade.

The Post documented the presence of more than 3,000 government and private organizations working on intelligence-related programs in about 10,000 locations across the country. The paper reported that an estimated 850,000 people now hold top-secret security clearances.

In a nutshell chock-full of irony, we are gathering so much information, literally no one knows exactly what we know. The apparatus publishes 50,000 reports a year -- 137 a day, 5 every hour -- a clear case of way too much information.

If there is an historic parallel, it may have occurred exactly 50 years ago, when President Dwight Eisenhower [famously warned](#) against the creation of a giant Military Industrial Complex, a development with "grave implications."

How grave are the implications of another of four years of the Patriot Act? In spite of trillions of bytes of information gathered, we really don't know.

Email: cpsarras@ksl.com

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