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By Marlene Lang

SpyNation is here, brought to you on three intriguing fronts.

The U.S. Senate moved Federal Intelligence Surveillance Act legislation one step closer to six-year renewal that will give CYA insurance to the telecoms that helped the Bush administration retrieve communications between foreigner parties and Americans without warrants.

When I first addressed this issue, some readers told me I was crazy, irresponsible and should be ashamed, because surely our government was only intercepting foreign-to-foreign communications, as the law permits.

No, we were sweeping up lots and lots of domestic-foreign calls, and yes, it was against the law.

Easy fix: Change the law.

Looks like the helpful communications giants who face some 40 lawsuits will be off the hook, and there will be nobody watching the house - the White House, that is.

But they will be watching you.

It's not just a telecom free-for-all. No, no. It takes more than that to make a SpyNation.

We will soon be spending \$100 million a year, for each of the next 10 years - that adds up to \$1 billion - to build the mother of all databases to store finger and palm prints and more. The FBI is dabbling with new biometric technology to make scans of the eye's iris and remembers where you have tats.

The FBI will be the keeper of the keys on this one; lots and lots of prints and images in a big "X-Files"-style underground facility under construction as we speak outside of Washington, D.C., beneath the hills of Virginia. These are not just criminal files. Just about anyone who must have background clearance for their job will be added, their prints, scans and even body mark-mapping from mug shots.

Of course, you'll have to sign to allow your info to be added to the database when you apply for those jobs. You have a choice.

The FBI already has 55 million prints in the can. And there will be more, more, more. The biometric technology is freaky stuff with fun implications on the table, like letting you skip ahead in airport lines if you give up a voluntary eye scan. Tempting.

The Washington Post reported the plan in December 2007, and a few other media sources have noted it since. A foreign news source reported that British police are in talks with the FBI about setting

up an international database using the same technology. The project is known as "Server in the Sky." Sounds like a U2 song.

It will all make the world a safer place.

So will Infragard. Haven't heard? It's another FBI creation that's been around at least 10 years - a happy cooperative effort between government and business in which members of local Infragard chapters are responsible, in case of certain emergencies, to protect the area of the infrastructure with which their business deals. These trusted partners would act like a citizen's militia, of sorts, to make sure that necessary services continue to operate in the event of the unthinkable.

The Progressive magazine just reported that the sweet deal member businesses receive in exchange for their loyal service is access to government information like security alerts: Before you or I or the media or anyone else knows when The Terrorists are planning a hit, the telecoms know, the nuclear power industry knows, perhaps McDonald's knows.

That sounds almost sensible, except for what one whistleblower told Progressive editor Matthew Rothschild. I wish it weren't quite so conceivable, but it is, in light of the FISA legislation about to

make communications companies unprosecutable for their failure to uphold the law and the Constitution.

One Infragard insider reportedly said that members were told when martial law is declared, they will be responsible to protect their area of the infrastructure at all cost, and that "if we had to use deadly force to protect it, we couldn't be prosecuted."

Deadly force against whom? Rothschild says Infragard has 23,000 members, with an FBI agent overseeing each local chapter.

The Progressive is a respectable publication that has been around almost 100 years. Far-fetched?

Irresponsible of Rothschild? Should he be ashamed? Is he crazy or duped, like the journalists who believed the defector stories about weapons of mass destruction? How can we tell who is telling the truth, Mr. Bond?

Welcome to the intrigue of SpyNation. You get to decide.

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