

# Surveillance cameras coming to Greek refugee camps

Refugees inside and outside the camps in Greece report being heavily monitored and having their data shared among governments

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Mostafa, 18, arrived in Greece a year and a half ago fleeing Iran, where his family had been living after their village in Afghanistan was attacked by the Taliban. Not being able to study or find a decent job, he first arrived at Moria camp with his family in the wake of a terrifying five-hour boat journey at night.

After fires broke out in the camp in September of last year, Mostafa said they were moved with the other 13,000 refugees to Kara Tepe camp. Life there is restricted, “boring, and being here for a long time causes us to lose our hope,” he said.

Refugees, such as Mostafa, must also deal with another issue that weighs on their mental health – surveillance.

Refugees inside and outside the camps in Greece report being heavily monitored – cameras, random checks, heavy police vigilance, drones and the collection and sharing of their data among governments. Greek authorities have recently announced a plan to introduce even more invasive and automated surveillance systems within the camps.

Mostafa says there are cameras everywhere and that “everything is under control of [the] police.” He is allowed to leave the camp only once a week, for three hours, to buy groceries.

Mina, a 22-year-old Afghan refugee, said police checked their phones and collected their data once she and other refugees arrived in Lesbos in October, 2019. However, she said, she wasn’t informed at any point about the purpose and destination of the data. Several European countries, including Greece, have expanded laws to allow for the extraction of refugee phone data in recent years – without people’s permission.

According to Petra Molnar, associate director at York University’s Refugee Law Lab, who visited refugee camps in Lesbos last year, the use of intense surveillance “strengthens that link between migrants as people who bring diseases and all of that, and bodies who must be managed, surveilled and kept under control.

“There’s this intersection that [the camps] are trying to make between using the pandemic as an excuse to roll out further surveillance.”

Marcus Michaelsen, Marie Sklodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel in Belgium, who is researching digital surveillance and repression, agreed. “One possible effect of the pandemic is that governments across the world are ramping up their technological



By next summer, Greek police will start using new ‘smart devices’ in refugee camps, like the Eleonas camp in Athens, above, that employ facial-recognition and fingerprint technology and will share the data with national and European databases. PETROS GIANNAKOURIS/AP

capacities to monitor and track COVID infections or enforce lockdown rules,” he said, adding that no one knows how all this data will be used afterward.

“The technical infrastructures put in place during the pandemic can easily be used for other purposes, to track dissidents, uncover civil-society networks, etc. Even in Europe, we have seen that police in different countries have accessed the data that restaurants and other businesses collected for contact tracing for completely different purposes,” Dr. Michaelsen said.

By next summer, Greek police will start using new “smart devices” that employ facial-recognition and fingerprint technology, sharing the data with national and European databases. This increases concern among human-rights organizations about personal information being shared between countries, without owners’ consent.

Dr. Molnar worries that contact-tracing mobile apps and other “biosurveillance” methods will soon be required for refugees crossing all EU borders, becoming what she calls “tools of oppression.”

Kian Vesteinsson, research analyst at Freedom House, explains that “enhanced surveillance over public and private speech could allow government officials to deny people entry to a country based on their political, social, or religious views, or that of their family.”

He warns that “without adequate safeguards and oversight, such tools can expose sensitive data to exploitation or abuse by private companies, security agencies, or

hackers intent on causing harm.”

One particular surveillance technology being used is voice printing. The U.S. and Germany have both used voice recognition to identify a refugee’s origin. “Digital surveillance can hit marginalized populations disproportionately hard,” Mr. Vesteinsson said.

“German authorities collect and analyze phone and computer data, including location information, from refugees who lack identity papers. Singapore’s migrant workers are required to use COVID-19 apps that are optional for other residents,” he added.

Several examples of new technologies being tested and implemented in refugee camps and along Europe’s borders were collected by the advocacy organization European Digital Rights (EDRI) for its report “Technological Testing Grounds: Border tech is experimenting with people’s lives,” released in late 2020.

The report found that technologies, such as body-heat scanners, iris scanners and social-media scraping had been used against those seeking passage from one country to another for years before the pandemic.

In Greece, which has faced a consistent wave of refugees crossing or seeking to cross its borders, migrants are subjected to AI-powered lie detectors in order to determine whether they are being truthful about their origins and reasons for fleeing their countries, according to Dr. Molnar.

Frontex, the European Union border and coast-guard agency, uses surveillance

measures to monitor the waters off Greece and the Greek and Turkish border, in what has been dubbed Operation Poseidon. It has been accused of pushing migrants back from EU waters and preventing them from exercising their right to seek asylum.

In an e-mailed statement, Frontex said: “Two inquiries have found no evidence of any participation by Frontex in any alleged violations of human rights at the Greek sea borders.” The internal inquiries have been criticized by human-rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, which is calling for an independent investigation.

Lena Karamanidou, research fellow at Glasgow Caledonian University and an expert in monitoring technology at the Greek-Turkish border, says surveillance has escalated to even-more harmful methods, including the Long Range Acoustic Device (LRAD).

LRADs are also known as acoustic cannons or sonic weapons and are designed to incapacitate by using sound and causing pain and hearing damage. Frontex said in a statement that it is not aware of the use of such equipment by Greek authorities.

The increase in these technologies, says Dr. Karamanidou, will not stop migration. “It will result in migrants being pushed into different routes into the EU, which will be more dangerous and deadlier than the existing ones. It will further inhibit access to international protection and engender more violations of rights.”

Special to The Globe and Mail

## Ambassador to China in ‘regular contact’ with Huawei over Meng, Garneau says

STEVEN CHASE  
SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY  
REPORTER

Dominic Barton, Canada’s ambassador to China, remains in “regular contact” with tech giant Huawei Technologies as he talks to Beijing and Washington to find a way to free Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor from Chinese jails, Foreign Affairs Minister Marc Garneau told MPs Monday.

Mr. Garneau, in an appearance before the House of Commons Special Committee on Canada-China Relations, shed new light on the apparent shuttle diplomacy role that Mr. Barton is playing as he tries to break a deadlock between the United States and China.

As The Globe and Mail first reported Monday, the Canadian envoy to China spent three weeks in Washington in early April holding talks with senior American officials aimed at facilitating the release of the two men, who have been locked up in Chinese prisons for 911 days.

Mr. Kovrig and Mr. Spavor were first detained in late 2018 shortly after Canada arrested Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou on a U.S. extradition request. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has accused Beijing of concocting “trumped up charges” against the two men in an effort to apply political pressure on Canada to release Ms. Meng.

Conservative foreign affairs critic Michael Chong asked Mr. Garneau why Mr. Barton, whose job is normally to represent Canada to China, was dispatched to Washington, where Canada’s ambassador to the United States, Kirsten Hillman, is posted.

Mr. Garneau said both envoys are playing key roles in talks, but he said Mr. Barton was sent to Washington because of his special expertise. “He is very knowledgeable about the situation

with respect to Madam Meng Wanzhou as well of course ... the situation in which the two Michaels find themselves.”

The Foreign Affairs Minister said Canada’s China envoy is also talking to Ms. Meng’s employer, which is based in Shenzhen.

“He is in regular contact with Huawei both in China and in Canada and the United States because of the presence of legal representatives of Huawei in the United States,” Mr. Garneau said.

Mr. Chong asked the minister whether Mr. Barton is carrying messages to Washington from Beijing and Mr. Garneau said no.

As The Globe reported, Mr. Barton met with officials from the White House National Security Council and the departments of Justice, State, Defence, Treasury and Commerce. He also held talks with Cui Tiankai, the Chinese ambassador to Washington.

In late 2020, the U.S. Justice Department held discussions with Huawei on a plea agreement that would have allowed Ms. Meng to return home, a move that could have led to the release of the two Canadians.

Mr. Garneau was asked about the future of Canada’s membership in the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The Department of Global Affairs previously warned his predecessor, François-Philippe Champagne, that the bank was set up by China in part “to leverage its economic prowess to gain regional influence and export its model of governance around the world.”

Last week the Financial Times reported that the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank has left open the door to funding projects in Myanmar even if the Southeast Asian country, ruled by a military junta, does not return to democracy.

Mr. Garneau said however Canada has no plans to leave the bank. “At this time we are not re-evaluating our involvement with

the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank but I will say that our policies with respect to China are continuously evolving.”

Separately, Monday, the minority Liberal government refused to comply with an order of the House passed June 2 requiring it to turn over uncensored copies of records on why two federal scientists were fired from Canada’s highest security infectious-disease laboratory and why Winnipeg’s National Microbiology Lab shipped two powerful viruses to China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology in March, 2019. Last week all three major opposition parties teamed up to pass a motion 179-149 demanding the documents. More than 250 pages of records have been completely redacted of all information.

Xiangguo Qiu and Keding Cheng were dismissed in January from the lab. Their security clearances had been revoked in July, 2019, and the RCMP were called in to investigate. They have been the focus of parliamentary debate for weeks as opposition MPs have sought information on what happened.

The Liberal government acknowledged the couple’s firing is related to sensitive national-security matters. For that reason, it says, it is ignoring the Commons motion and declining to provide the information to the special House of Commons committee on Canada-China relations. The Liberals say they are only prepared to hand over classified documents to a different committee of parliamentarians that reports directly to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Conservative House Leader Gérard Deltell accused the Liberals of treating the Commons with contempt. “This isn’t a game. It is about the fundamental and ancient powers of the House of Commons, to act as the grand inquest of the nation, being openly defied, dismissed and mocked by this Liberal government.”



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