

Someone is looking over your shoulder... Are national identification cards an unnecessary invasion of privacy?

Halid Al-Midhar and Nawaf Alhamzi were two known terrorists among the passengers on the planes in Sept. 11th tragedy. Alarming, both the FBI and the CIA knew that the men were in the United States almost a month before the attack but they were unable to locate either of them. The terrorists were lost in the American public, a country with some of the loosest personal identification laws in the world. Four of the hijackers used fake passports to obtain personal identification documents in the United States, while another obtained drivers licenses in multiple states, even though he had an outstanding arrest warrant.

These occurrences bring to light the fact that the ability to create a pseudo-identity in the United States is far too easy. To think that a known terrorist can slip into our society unnoticed by any of the identification measures currently in place is alarming. Americans must adopt a stricter identification system to protect our own enemies from hiding among us.

The most plausible solution is the creation of a national identification card that carries information about the holder and some kind of biometric identification, like a thumbprint or retinal scan. This card, in conjunction with a national database containing information on American citizens, would greatly benefit our society.

Some fear a database like this would evolve into a misused citizen surveillance system, a theory popularized by Hollywood movies like *Minority Report*. The truth is that a similar system already exists. According to the College Station Police Department, every time an officer pulls over a citizen and runs his/her driver's license through their computer, the citizen's identification is sent to Austin where it is run through a statewide database and an already existing national database that checks for past criminal activity. The inclusion of this system to include a citizen's DNA information and thumbprint poses no threat to the average law-abiding citizen, but would pose a great stumbling block to terrorist groups that prey on the current system.

Anyone with a laser printer and Photoshop could produce a birth certificate," said John A. Munday, president of Polaroid. Terrorists have become very good at forging fake information, but while stealing a person's Social Security number or forging a birth certificate is within their means, stealing a thumbprint is not. Society made these ID cards an everyday part of American life — similar to a driver's license — then a terrorist could not function in our society.

Aside from the threat of terrorism, these cards would solve other problems, including Social Security fraud and identity theft. With the ID cards in place, an individual could no longer milk the system with multiple Social Security numbers to run multiple checks. The national ID cards would effectively match one individual with the identity by linking every Social Security number with a corresponding fingerprint. Secondly, it would stop the problem of identity theft. The U.S. Secret Service estimates that in 1997, consumers lost more than \$745 million to identity theft. If more proof of existence were demanded, such as a thumbprint, then this threat would also be quashed. As the world grows more and more linked through shared information, it becomes only necessary that we increase security to guarantee the valid information. National ID cards are a step in the right direction and should be adopted by the United States to match faceless criminals with their thumbprints.

Citizens and government officials alike are searching for ways to guard against future terrorist attacks. One option that has been suggested in the past weeks is implementation of a national identification card system.

This idea was proposed to President Bush in a classified briefing last week. Proponents say ID cards would allow airlines to accurately identify passengers, which would help in the fight against terrorism. According to a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, 70 percent of Americans support such a program. Despite this support, ID cards are not the solution to terrorism. They would do little, if anything, to prevent future attacks. And they could do a great deal to destroy freedoms that Americans have enjoyed for more than 200 years.

Larry Ellison, CEO of Oracle, the world's leading maker of database software, has offered to donate the software necessary to make a national ID program work. Under Ellison's plan, all American citizens would be

required to carry an ID card with personal information, a photograph and a digitized thumbprint. All of the information on these cards would be kept in a database used by airport security. Before a passenger could board a plane, he would have to swipe his card and place his thumb on an electronic reader. The computer would then match the thumbprint with the ID card and database information to verify his identity.

If this system had been in place a month ago, it would not have prevented the hijackings of Sept. 11. None of the terrorists were American citizens, and most appear to have been in the country legally. Even if the hijackers had been Americans, the organization responsible for these attacks could still have beaten the system. It could afford to teach people to fly airplanes, so it could surely have managed to produce a few fake ID cards. High school students have been doing it for years.

An even more serious problem with the ID card proposal is that there is little chance the information on the cards and in the databases would be used solely for air travel. British Prime Minister Tony Blair has already approved a national ID card system in Great Britain, and it will be much more extensive than Ellison's plan. According to the UK's *Daily Mirror*, British citizens will not only have to present an ID card to board aircraft, but also to buy gas, open a bank account or start a job. Also, in a nationwide poll performed by News of the World, a majority of the British respondents believed that, in addition to personal information, an ID card should contain its holder's DNA details, criminal records and religion.

Under this system, anyone to whom an individual had to present his card, such as a gas station attendant, could become privy to personal information. ID cards could become scarlet letters alerting the public to an individual's religious, ethnic or political affiliations. For example, how might merchants treat citizens who present cards with "Muslim" — or whatever other group has currently fallen out of favor with society — stamped on it? Or, if the card carried DNA evidence, what is to stop prospective employers from discriminating against applicants with high likelihoods of developing certain diseases?

The cards and associated databases would also give the federal government tremendous power. In the book *1984*, George Orwell describes a nightmarish future police state where the government, known as "Big Brother," monitors every move of its citizens. Mandatory ID cards could almost make Orwell's vision a reality. The government would be able to track where people go, what they buy, how they worship — the possibilities are limitless. In Nazi Germany, lack of proper identification papers resulted in immediate arrest. What would happen to Americans caught without an ID card?

If an unscrupulous ruler came to power, the government could cause plenty of harm with the information at its disposal. Of course, few people think that our country is in danger of becoming a totalitarian nation. Some of these possible outcomes seem almost laughable right now. But to think that our government could never move in that direction is naive. Power corrupts, and controlling this kind of information would be dangerously close to absolute power.

It is both necessary and appropriate that our nation seek ways to avoid future terrorist attacks. We must be careful, however, not to overreact and put an end to individual rights in the process. A national ID card would create more problems than it would solve. Big Brother should find other ways to fight terrorism.



TIM DYLL



CHARLTON WIMBERLY



Tim Dyll is a senior electrical engineering major.

RUBEN DELUNA • THE BATTALION

Charlton Wimberly is a graduate student in accounting.

MAIL CALL

Code of Honor sometimes taken seriously

I am writing as a kind of warning to all fellow Aggies. I was under the naive impression that the Aggie Code of Honor was taken seriously. Therefore, I have never been really over-attentive to my possessions while around campus or neighboring businesses. Friday night, my purse was stolen and I innocently assumed that I had lost or misplaced it and therefore waited to call my credit card companies. I assumed if an Aggie had found it that it would be returned to me. There were plenty of ways to contact me: my student ID, my drivers license, my checkbook, my wallet, my phone, and finally called the police and filed a report, under the impression that it would make its way back to me. I found out recently not only had it been stolen, but that my possessions were being used and that the person using it is a fellow Aggie student. So the important lesson to be learned here is where the warning comes in. Do not blindly believe in the innate goodness of students at A&M over other places. Respect your possessions to be stolen and have all the information on what you carry in your purse and wallet filed away at home so that when your identity gets stolen unexpectedly you won't have to go to the hassle of trying to put things together so that you can go on with your day activity. This may seem trivial to some, but then again you still have all of your possessions and your naive belief in the goodness of the Aggie spirit.

Tara Afrakhteh
Class of 2001

Separate facilities a bad idea

In response to Kellin Zimmer's October 5th column:

Except for having read Eric Dickens' opinions in *The Battalion* the past couple years, I would have to say that Ms. Zimmer's column was one of the most ridiculous columns I have read in *The Battalion*.

She suggests that a "separate, but equal" public facility, paid for with public funds, be created for women on this campus to have "separate, but equal" access to work out equipment.

It is my understanding from basic high school history and political science classes that the US Supreme Court ruled many years ago that "separate, but equal" was inherently unequal.

That being said, if Ms. Zimmer wants a private place to work out and exercise, she can do what everyone else has the right to do — join a private club.

As long as everyone is paying the same Rec Center fees, there should be no men-only, women-only, blacks-only, etc. areas. It is a facility funded equally by every student on campus and therefore the whole facility should be equally accessible to all students on campus.

Everyone, regardless of race or gender, should be able to have full access to the Student Recreation Center and all its advantages.

Marc Barringer
Class of 1992

Innovative punishment

Here's an innovative way to fix the situation in Afghanistan. Killing Bin Laden will only create a martyr. Holding him prisoner will inspire his comrades to take hostages to demand his release.

Therefore, let us do neither. Have the Special Forces covertly capture him, fly him to an undisclosed hospital, and let surgeons quickly perform a complete sex change operation. Then return her to Afghanistan to live as a woman under the Taliban.

Keith Wilson
Class of 1999

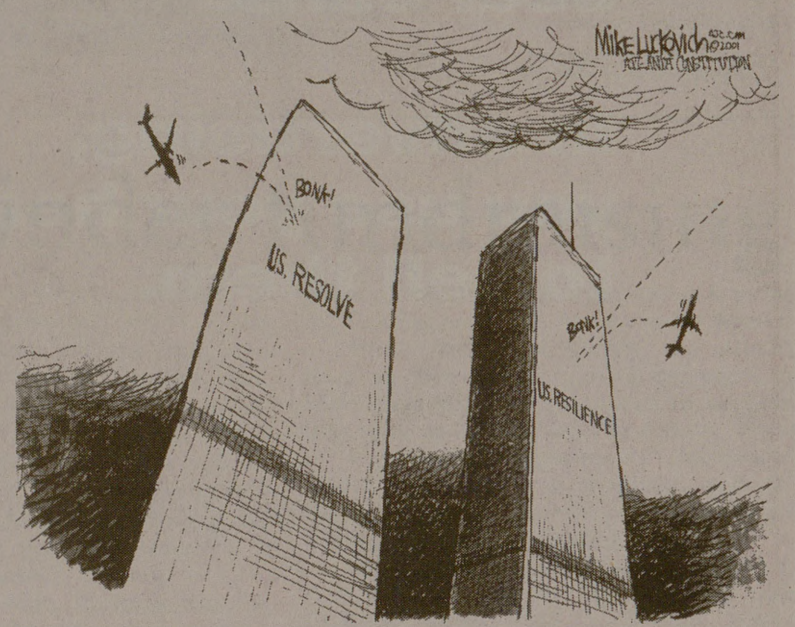
Irish fan enjoyed AggieLand

I attended the Notre Dame game at Kyle Field. Although I did not like the outcome, I wish to compliment the students and alumni on the reception I received from the time I arrived in College Station until leaving.

Although I was dressed in my Notre Dame cap, golf shirt and jacket, everywhere I went I was greeted cordially with many fans. I cannot remember being greeted that way at any other school while out in my Irish outfit.

The maroon crowd even had me locking arms with them and swaying to your school's fight song. I enjoyed my stay immensely, and thanks to the fans. I hope South Bend fans will do the same.

Bart Cooper



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The opinion editor reserves the right to edit letters for length, style and accuracy. Letters may be submitted in person at 014 Reed McDonald with a valid student ID. Letters also may be mailed to:

The Battalion — Mail Call
014 Reed McDonald • MS 1111
Texas A&M University
College Station, TX
77843-1111

Fax: (979) 845-2647
Mail Call: mailcall@thebatt.com
Email: opinion@thebatt.com

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