

The High Cost of Security: Aerial Surveillance in America

They who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Security, deserve neither Liberty nor Security. ~Benjamin Franklin

Two Aerostats will be launched in October on U.S. soil by the United States Army to monitor potential threats to America. An Aerostat is a high-dollar blimp capable of conducting surveillance 24/7 for 30 days in a row. The aerostats radar will be able to see up to 340 miles in all directions seeing from Raleigh, N.C., to Boston and out to Lake Erie. They will be capable of seeing images, like vehicles from 140 miles away as far south as Richmond, as far west as Cumberland, Md., and as far north as Staten Island. The Army did not deem it necessary to conduct a Privacy Impact Assessment because the Aerostats are not intended to collect any personally identifiable information. The Army has stated that they have “no current plans” to mount surveillance cameras or infrared sensors on the aerostats or to share information with federal, state or local law enforcement, but they declined to rule out that possibility either. The Aerostats are intended to track surface objects like vehicles and boats. Privacy advocates argue that location information can easily lead to the identification of individuals if collected on a mass scale and analyzed over time. When the Government is conducting any kind of real time aerial surveillance on U.S. soil there are privacy issues that need to be addressed. After all, Americans have strongly opposed the idea of drones patrolling American soil and yet there will now be two aerostats watching the greater Washington D.C. area. How long will Americans accept national security interest as a carte blanche reason to interfere with millions of American’s privacy rights? The use of Aerostats by the U.S. Government is excessive and should not be ignored or just accepted by the American people as a reasonable exercise of power.