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## WHAT MATTERS: JANUARY 2003

### Big Brother Is No Longer Fiction: On the Internet, Everyone Knows You're a Poindexter

Total Information Awareness (TIA)-a new government R&D program-evokes the specter of a total surveillance state while it purports to defend America against the threat of terrorism. Before I present "information awareness" about how the government is harnessing technology for TIA, let's review the context of recent efforts to fight terrorism and increase the security of U.S. citizens.

Energized by the horrific events of September 11th, the federal government has-rapidly, and with very little debate-enacted draconian measures to enforce a "security" state. Ostensibly designed to crack down on terrorists, these new measures are in fact terrorizing many U.S. residents, rolling back decades of hard-won civil rights protections, and threatening the very basis of our democratic system, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

These measures include: The USA PATRIOT Act (the acronym stands for Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) and the Homeland Security Act, arrests and detentions without charges, secret military tribunals, nullification of judicial safeguards, and unwarranted domestic spying on private citizens and their communications, purchases, [even library habits](#). Technologies under development by the TIA program will create an information security apparatus worthy of George Orwell's *1984* or the cynical-paranoid worldview of Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's *The Illuminatus! Trilogy*.

If the technologies themselves aren't creepy enough, you might shudder when you see the early logo (above) of the Information Awareness Office (IAO). Recently removed from their website, the chilling graphic featured a Masonic pyramid-recognizable from the back of the U. S. Dollar bill-except in this version the pyramid's all-seeing eye scans the globe with a surreal light beam worthy of science fiction. Perhaps even more disturbing, the office is headed by former Admiral John Poindexter. You might remember him from Iran-Contra, the Reagan administration's secret scheme to support Nicaraguan terrorists with proceeds from illegal arms sales to Iran. As [William Safire](#) reminded us in *The New York Times*:

"A jury convicted Poindexter in 1990 on five felony counts of misleading Congress and making false statements, but an appeals court overturned the verdict because Congress had given him immunity for his testimony."