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*Part 3 of a four-part series*

## **September 11: The circumstantial case**

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April 24, 2002—The terrorists could not have picked a better time to attack America for the Bush administration. George W. Bush's conservative agenda was bogged down in a newly Democratic Senate. The week of the attacks, Newsweek ran a cover story detailing the Bush campaign's skullduggery in the Florida election debacle. The George W.'s overall approval ratings were slipping into the 40 percent range.

All that changed on September 11. Once the butt of late-night stand-up comedians, Bush became a national hero literally overnight. His approval ratings rose to never-before-seen levels. The man who lost the election to Al Gore by almost half a million votes was now ranked among the greatest presidents of all time in opinion polls.

Plans were pushed through Congress for conservative policies which had nothing to do with the war. Opposition, even to items such as corporate tax cuts, was now labeled unpatriotic.

### **The USA Patriot Act**

In the aftermath of the attacks, the USA Patriot Act was passed by Congress, granting heretofore unimaginable powers to the government to monitor domestic activities. In essence, it blurred the distinctions between the FBI and the CIA.

The attorney general and secretary of state can now declare what groups are terrorists, and the CIA can identify what groups are targeted for surveillance in the U.S. In fact, the very definition of "domestic terrorism" is expanded.

Judicial supervision of telephone and Internet surveillance is relaxed. The FBI can search highly sensitive and personal medical and financial records without having to show evidence of a crime and without a court order.

Many of these changes may be used in cases not even related or relevant to the investigation of terrorism!

While many of these provisions would have been unthinkable before the attacks, after the attacks objections would be labeled as "unpatriotic" and "aiding terrorists." Moreover, polls showed that Americans were more than willing to forego certain constitutional rights in order to feel "safer."

The concern, however, is clear. Many of these provisions weaken judicial oversight. Others allow the CIA to spy on Americans, and give arbitrary powers to define even what constitutes a “terrorist.” The potential for abuse in the hands of the wrong people is enormous. Throughout modern history, any oppressive regime has only to label its opponents as terrorists to shut them down. Even today, Robert Mugabe has used this tactic in his attempt to hold onto power in Zimbabwe.

Are these sweeping new powers warranted? The public seems to think so. Yet, numerous news agencies have reported that some of the hijackers—for example, Khalid Almihdhar and Nawaf Alhazmi—were already wanted by the CIA! More astonishingly, nine of the hijackers were chosen for extra screening by the airport security system, but were allowed to board their flights unmolested! If even one of these men were searched it might have broken up the whole effort. Consequently, it appeared that the old system, in some way, failed. Wouldn’t it have been wiser to find the holes in the old system instead of issuing these sweeping new powers? Then again, perhaps the sweeping new powers were the point.

### **The Office of Homeland Security**

This hazily defined agency was created by the executive branch and former Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Ridge, a Republican, was chosen to head it. Despite claims of the importance of the new office, Bush has not given Ridge a cabinet-level position, making it easier for him to avoid congressional oversight.

A recent report in Salon revealed that at least one of the functions the agency is developing is a plan for military control of the country in the face of a national crisis. Despite the gravity of this task, Ridge, at first, refused to testify before Congress, despite repeated entreaties to do so. When he finally acquiesced, he testified behind closed doors. To date, only vague warnings and a color-coded alert system have come out of this agency. What it plans to do with its nearly \$40 million budget is unknown.

### **The Office of Strategic Influence**

In February, a story appeared in the *New York Times* about a newly created office inside the Pentagon. Named the Office of Strategic Influence, it was to be, in essence, a propaganda center. The Pentagon had always used disinformation against U.S. enemies. What made this unique, however, was the fact that it would apparently attempt to influence public opinion into supporting Bush’s war, even among U.S. allies, by planting false stories and sending e-mails to influential people. In essence, it would combine traditional public relations of the type used to influence political campaigns with covert “black” operations.

The press and the public sent up a tremendous outcry. The press pointed out that since it frequently relies on overseas reports, there was no guarantee that the false stories wouldn’t find their way into the U.S. media. Besides, there were ethical concerns about using psychological operations against allies and noncombatants.

The concerns were legitimate. If the government can intentionally propagandize allies, then why not the American people? And how could Americans believe the information coming out of the Pentagon? What would stop false news stories from being planted in the United States media?

The outrage over the proposal led Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to announce that the office would not go ahead as planned. But the damage to the credibility of the defense department had already been done. The new war, it seemed, would be as much one of public opinion as of bombs.

### **The Shadow Government**

In March, the Washington Post broke the story that, for the first time in history, Cold War contingency plans for a shadow government had been activated, and that a second, secret executive branch was living and working in hiding.

Most disturbingly, this Shadow Government was activated *without even notifying the U.S. Congress*. The significance of this cannot be overstated. It is conceivable that had the Washington Post not broken the story, neither Congress nor the American people would have any idea of its existence *to this day*. It should be noted that only members of the executive branch are represented in this shadow government—apparently there are no appropriations for a continuity of the legislative or judicial branches. This is particularly disturbing, because in the event of a catastrophic attack on Washington, the system of checks and balances that prevents the U.S. from becoming a dictatorship would no longer exist. Yet, this shadow government was in existence for almost six months without the Bush administration bothering to tell Congress or the American people. USA Today reported that Vice President Cheney was heavily involved in shaping the plan.

Why was a secret shadow government activated? Even during the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, when nuclear catastrophe seemed most imminent, this extraordinary step was not taken. Why now, especially when all the evidence released shows absolutely no evidence of al-Qaeda possessing any nuclear weapons or even the capability to make a so-called “dirty bomb?”

Does the government know something we don't?

### **Bush's Power Grab**

The *Washington Post* wrote: “On a wide variety of fronts, the administration has moved to seize power that it has shared with other branches of government. In foreign policy, Bush announced vast cuts in the U.S. nuclear arsenal but resisted putting the cuts in a treaty—thereby averting a Senate ratification vote. In domestic policy, the administration proposed reorganizing the Immigration and Naturalization Service without the congressional action lawmakers sought. And in legal policy, the administration seized the judiciary's power as Bush signed an order allowing terrorists to be tried in military tribunals.

“Those actions, all taken last week, build on earlier Bush efforts to augment White House power, including initiatives to limit intelligence briefings to members of Congress, take new spending authority from the legislature, and expand the executive branch’s power to monitor and detain those it suspects of terrorism.”

What’s remarkable is that the justification for all this power consolidation is “wartime,” even though no war had been declared. Just as disturbing is the fact that, according to numerous administration officials, “This war will not end in our lifetimes.” That apparently means that the executive branch intends to wield this power in perpetuity.

People are quick to point out that there is no real evidence of significant abuses of these powers to date. But then again, there were none in Germany in 1933. Once the mechanisms had been set in place, there was increasingly less and less to prevent their eventual abuse as the years went by. Eventually, the abuses became a fact of life, and the horror of the Nazi state was unleashed on the people of Germany, and eventually the world.

### **The Iran-Contra Connection**

Many of the principals involved in the Iran-Contra affair have been returned to power, and many occupy prominent positions in the Bush administration. Convicted Iran-Contra conspirator John Poindexter has been made the head of a newly created Information Awareness Office, where his job will be finding new ways to monitor and decrypt electronic information.

Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for Inter-American Affairs during the Reagan years, now works for the National Security Council overseeing human rights and democracy issues. He was pardoned by former president George H. W. Bush.

Otto Reich ran a State Department office during the Iran-Contra affair that engaged in illegal covert propaganda against the Sandinistas. Now he’s the new assistant secretary of state for Western Hemisphere affairs.

John Negroponte was the US Ambassador to Honduras and facilitated a clandestine quid pro quo deal, under which the Reagan Administration sent aid to Honduras in return for Honduran assistance to the Contras at a time when Congress had banned the administration from assisting the Contras. Negroponte is currently the United States’ ambassador to the United Nations.

That’s four prominent members of the current administration who have *already been accused or indicted as conspirators by Congress!*

Not to be overlooked is the father of our current president, George Herbert Walker Bush. Bush was, of course, the vice president at the time of the deals. During the Iran-Contra investigations, Bush claimed he was “out of the loop.” However, after he left office, it was revealed that Bush had attended several meetings on the Iran initiative and the quid pro quo with Honduras. He even noted such in his personal diary notes for November 5, 1986.

And let's not forget Colonel Oliver North. In 1984, as FEMA's NSA contact, North collaborated with the FEMA chief Louis Giuffrida on a "Defense Resources Act," as well as a presidential executive order for severe national emergencies. The Defense Resources Act would allow the president to impose censorship, seize the means of production and outlaw anti-government strikes, while the executive order allowed FEMA to take over all government operations, and contained provisions for "the detention of enemy aliens." North also planned FEMA-Pentagon war game scenarios that contemplated the imposition of martial law and the suspension of key constitutional guarantees, such as freedom of speech and due process. The Pentagon confirmed that the simulations, code named Rex 84 Alpha and Night Train 84, took place April 5–13, 1984. Interestingly, the *Miami Herald* also reported that Giuffrida attempted to steer FEMA into areas beyond civil defense, specifically counter-terrorism.

So that means that during the Reagan administration, the Iran-Contra ringleaders were devising plans for national emergencies that would impose martial law and suspend the Constitution. These are the people who are back in power. What sort of emergencies were they planning for? And why was FEMA so interested in counter-terrorism in 1984?

**Next:**

In Part 4, we look at historical precedents for such a conspiracy, tie the ends together, and ask why these facts have not been dealt with.

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