

Attacks on democratic rights, breaching legal barriers: FEMA and Katrina: REX-84 Revisited

The "Black Curtain" around FEMA's Operations

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If you believe the corporate media, FEMA is simply a bungling and inept emergency management agency and its director, Michael Brown, according to the [Washington Post](#), is simply an “accidental director” and “the failed head of an Arabian horse sporting group who was plucked from obscurity to become President Bush’s point man for the worst natural disaster in U.S. history” and, as the [Boston Globe](#) notes, “got the job through an old college friend who at the time was heading up FEMA.... Brown — formerly an estates and family lawyer — this week has made several shocking public admissions, including interviews where he suggested FEMA was unaware of the misery and desperation of refugees stranded at the New Orleans convention center.” In short, the corporate media would have us believe Brown is a clueless lawyer and former horse trader and FEMA an unresponsive federal bureaucratic leviathan wrapped up in red tape. But this does not explain the following:

FEMA refused evacuation help from Amtrak; it turned away experienced fire fighters and first responders; it turned back Wal-Mart supply trucks; refused to allow the Red Cross to deliver food; blocked a 500-boat citizen flotilla from delivering aid; turned away generators and other equipment (see [this page](#) with links to news stories). In other words, FEMA went out of its way to deny aid and allow people to die from dehydration, starvation, and lack of medicine and medical help. In addition to denying aid, and thus killing an as of yet (and possibly forever) unknown number of people, FEMA is attempting to control media access to the worst natural disaster in American history (see [Journalist Groups Protest FEMA Ban on Photos of Dead](#)). Moreover, journalists and photographers have been assaulted by troops and had their notebooks and cameras confiscated (see [The Eye of the Hurricane](#) by Matthias Gebauer).

Regardless of all the corporate media hype, FEMA was not created to respond to natural disasters and help American citizens (in fact, it is an unconstitutional construct, created by Executive Order, and draws its “lawful” facade not from the American people, but the fact Executive Order 12148 was published in the Federal Registry). “FEMA has only spent about 6 percent of its budget on national emergencies, the bulk of their funding has been used for the construction of secret underground facilities to assure continuity of government in case of a major emergency, foreign or domestic,” writes [Harry V. Martin](#). “General Frank Salzedo, chief of FEMA’s Civil Security Division stated in a 1983 conference that he saw FEMA’s role as a ‘new frontier in the protection of individual and governmental leaders from assassination, and of civil and military installations from sabotage and/or attack, as well as prevention of dissident groups from gaining access to U.S. opinion, or a global audience in times of crisis.’” In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, a lot of criticism is focused on FEMA, but

this is not the first time the agency has taken heat for “dropping the ball” after natural disasters. Martin writes:

FEMA’s deceptive role really did not come to light with much of the public until Hurricane Andrew smashed into the U.S. mainland. As Russell R. Dynes, director of the Disaster Research Center of the University of Delaware, wrote in *The World and I*, “...The eye of the political storm hovered over the Federal Emergency Management Agency. FEMA became a convenient target for criticism.” Because FEMA was accused of dropping the ball in Florida, the media and Congress commenced to study this agency. What came out of the critical look was that FEMA was spending 12 times more for “black operations” than for disaster relief. It spent \$1.3 billion building secret bunkers throughout the United States in anticipation of government disruption by foreign or domestic upheaval. Yet fewer than 20 members of Congress, only members with top security clearance, know of the \$1.3 billion expenditure by FEMA for non-natural disaster situations. These few Congressional leaders state that FEMA has a “black curtain” around its operations. FEMA has worked on National Security programs since 1979, and its predecessor, the Federal Emergency Preparedness Agency, has secretly spent millions of dollars before being merged into FEMA by President Carter in 1979.

One such black op was REX-84 (Alpha Explan, or Readiness Exercise 1984), exposed by the Miami Herald on July 5, 1987, and described as “a secret government within a government.” Iran-Contra criminal Oliver North “worked closely with FEMA to redraw national contingency plans dealing with nearly everything from nuclear attack to civil insurrection,” explains totse.com ([FEMA: Blueprint For Tyranny](#)). “FEMA’s action plan included the declaration of martial law, suspension of the Constitution and aggressive moves against dissenters. A trigger could be ‘violent and widespread internal dissent.’ This plan and its failure to clearly define a national crisis caused Attorney General Smith to issue an official protest. The Herald reported that on Aug. 2, 1984, Smith emphatically expressed to National Security Advisor Robert ‘Bud’ McFarlane his alarm over FEMA’s ‘expansion of the definition of severe emergency to encompass “routine” domestic law enforcement emergencies.’” Under Reagan, Louis O. Giuffrida, “a stealth-obsessed ex-California National Guard officer who preferred to be addressed according to his former rank in that organization,” as [Jonathan Vankin and John Whalen](#) describe him, oversaw FEMA. During the late sixties and early seventies, Giuffrida served as then California governor Reagan’s terrorism advisor and at Reagan’s request founded the California Specialized Training Institute, a school for police and military commandos. “Giuffrida and [Edwin] Meese (then Governor Reagan’s chief assistant) helped develop a plan to purge California of its militant and peaceful protesters,” Vankin and Whalen write. “Operation Cable Splicer, a variation of the Army Garden Plot, a ‘domestic counterinsurgency’ scheme, spied on suspected radicals and marshaled maximum force to squash riots and legitimate demonstrations alike.”

It appears Hurricane Katrina has provided FEMA with an excuse to “dry run” its unconstitutional powers in New Orleans, rounding up “refugees” (now called “evacuees”) and “relocating” them in various camps. “Some evacuees are being treated as ‘internees’ by FEMA,” writes former NSC employee [Wayne Madsen](#). “Reports continue to come into WMR that evacuees from New Orleans and Acadiana [the traditional twenty-two parish Cajun homeland] who have been scattered across the United States are being treated as ‘internees’ and not dislocated American citizens from a catastrophe. Some FEMA facilities are preventing these internees from leaving on their own. Reports of mandatory registration and the issuing of FEMA ID cards suggest that FEMA, an agency that is rife with right-wing

security goons and severely lacking in humanitarian workers, has other motives in treating poor and destitute American citizens as prisoners in their own country.” Call it REX-84 revisited.

“The disaster that struck New Orleans and the southern Gulf Coast has given rise to the largest military mobilization in modern history on US soil. Nearly 65,000 US military personnel are now deployed in disaster area, transforming the devastated port city into a war zone,” writes [Bill Van Auken](#). “While no doubt incompetence and indifference played a major role [in the supposedly bungled aid effort], there is also strong evidence that aid was deliberately withheld by the White House and the Pentagon as part of a strategy for asserting unfettered military control over the city.... the US ruling elite and both major parties have used September 11 as the pretext for implementing far-reaching attacks on democratic rights and breaching legal barriers — such as Posse Comitatus — against the use of military force against the American people.” Van Auken mentions “that US military’s Northern Command had developed a series of ‘war plans’ for the military ‘to take charge’ in domestic crises” allegedly in response to “supposed terrorist attacks, including the detonation of a nuclear device in a major American city” and “the catastrophe that struck New Orleans provided ideal conditions for testing the plans out.”

Finally, as a corollary of the FEMA-Pentagon operations in New Orleans (as opposed to the soft and squishy and apparently endless corporate media spin about displaced people finding solace in private homes and humanitarian shelters), see Don Nash’s [Refugees from New Orleans behind barbed wire in Utah](#) and [I just got back from a FEMA Detainment Camp](#), the latter posted by a Christian man who attempted to deliver aid to Louisiana “refugees” (or detainees) in Oklahoma and was turned away by FEMA bureaucrats.

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