

Natural Disasters and the Militarization of America

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Both the Avian Flu threat, which has taken on a political twist, and the hurricane disasters are being used by the Bush White House to justify a greater role for the Military in the country's civilian affairs.

Bush hinted, offhandedly, at the height of Hurricane Rita that the Military should become the "lead agency" in disaster relief:

"Is there a natural disaster—of a certain size—that would then enable the Defense Department to become the lead agency in coordinating and leading the response effort? That's going to be a very important consideration for Congress to think about."

A few weeks later at a White House Press Conference, President Bush pointed to a role for the Military in enforcing quarantines in the case of an outbreak of avian flu:

"I have thought through the scenarios of what an avian flu outbreak could mean. ... If we had an outbreak somewhere in the United States, do we not then quarantine that part of the country? And how do you, then, enforce a quarantine? ... And who best to be able to effect a quarantine? One option is the use of a military that's able to plan and move. So that's why I put it on the table. I think it's an important debate for Congress to have." (White House Press conference, October 4, 2005)

Meanwhile, a new media consensus is in the making. Highlighted in the tabloids and on network TV, the threats of natural disasters are now casually lumped together with those associated with a terror attack on the Homeland. According to Daniel Henniger writing in the Wall Street Journal:

"The question raised by the Katrina fiasco. is whether the threat from madmen [Osama and Al Zaraqawi] and nature is now sufficiently huge in its potential horror and unacceptable loss that we should modify existing jurisdictional authority to give the Pentagon functional first-responder status."

Fait Accompli

What is the dividing line, from the point of view of emergency procedures, between these two distinct phenomena? Or *is there* a dividing line between a humanitarian disaster resulting from a natural cause on the one hand, and a real or perceived "terror attack on

America” on the other?

The Department of Homeland Security’s [National Response Plan \(NRP\)](#) (December 2004) eliminates the distinction between a civilian and a national security emergency situation:

“This approach is unique and far reaching in that it, for the first time, eliminates critical seams and ties together a complete spectrum of incident management activities to include the prevention of, preparedness for, response to, and recovery from terrorism, major natural disasters, and other major emergencies. The end result is vastly improved coordination among Federal, State, local, and tribal organizations to help save lives and protect America’s communities by increasing the speed, effectiveness, and efficiency of incident management.”

<http://www.dhs.gov/interweb/assetlibrary/NRPbaseplan.pdf> italics added

The NRP is fully operational: the militarisation of emergency procedures is, in many regards, “a done deal”.

The NRP is built around emergency procedures in the case of a “terrorist attack”: it focuses on “incident management”. It is endorsed by lead federal agencies and government departments (including the CIA and the DoD).

Deployment in the case of a major civilian emergency (e.g. hurricane and/or avian flu pandemic) would be governed by the same criteria in conformity with the basic tenets of the “war on terrorism”. The latter also characterize the workings of FEMA.

The Militarization of “Civil Society” Relief Organizations

The militarisation of disaster relief has also been endorsed by the [American Red Cross](#), the [Corporation for National and Community Service](#) and the [National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster \(NVOAD\)](#). These key organizations are signatories of the National Response Plan. They have endorsed Homeland Security’s definition of a national emergency. Under the NRP, these key civilian organizations are directly under the authority of the DHS, FEMA and the Pentagon. Distinct from the Corporation for National and Community Service, the NVOAD regroups [a large number of individual non-governmental organizations](#). In signing the NRP, these organizations have foregone their “civilian” mandate in disaster relief.

In relation to Hurricane Wilma, the DoD has set up a Defense Coordinating Office, which operates out of the State Emergency Operations Center in Tallahassee, Florida.

More significantly, the Pentagon has dispatched US Northern Command officials to FEMA national headquarters. According to Frances Fragos Townsend, Homeland Security Adviser to President Bush, the U.S. Northern Command “planners” have a mandate “to deploy the military if needed.” (quoted in Seattle Times, 22 Oct 2005).

Criminal Charges against Bush Administration officials

The renewed call for a greater role for the military in the country’s civilian affairs has emerged at a critical political juncture. The Plame-CIA leak investigation, led by Special

Counsel Fitzgerald could result in criminal charges and impeachment procedures directed against key members of the Bush Cabinet, including Vice President Dick Cheney.

While the “war on terrorism” is still the main pretext for a greater role of the military, natural disasters constitute a new and innovative justification.

Meanwhile, the humanitarian disaster in the Gulf as well as the perceived threat of a bird flu pandemic are being used to deflect public attention from the broader issue of conspiracy and war crimes revealed by counsel Fitzgerald. More generally, heightened terror alerts or the perceived dangers of an avian flu pandemic, could also be used to trigger emergency procedures with a view to creating an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

Congressman Jerrold Nadler, in a letter to the Deputy Attorney General, has called for Special Counsel Fitzgerald “to expand his investigation to include a criminal investigation to examine whether the President, the Vice President, and members of the White House Iraq Group conspired to deliberately deceive Congress into authorizing the war in Iraq.”

This initiative follows that of Congressman John Conyers and 90 other Congressional Democrats who addressed a letter to President Bush regarding “a coordinated effort to fix the intelligence and facts to justify the war. Congressman Conyers and other Congressional Democrats on June 16 held an unofficial hearing concerning the Downing Street Memo that resembled an impeachment inquiry.”

(See

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=MAN20050702&articleid=622>

Congressman Nadler’s letter to the Deputy Attorney General points to the “‘White House Iraq Group’ whose sole purpose appears to have been to market and sell a decision to go to war to Congress...”

The letter also points to the leaked Downing Street memo:

“Although Mr. Fitzgerald’s investigation has yet to determine whether a crime was committed by any Administration official(s) in leaking the identity of Wilson’s wife as a covert CIA operative, it is abundantly clear that the White House Iraq Group was engaged in an effort to discredit revelations of the falsity of the Administration’s justifications for the war, and to intimidate and punish those who would reveal the truth.... We now know that top Administration officials, including Vice President Cheney’s Chief of Staff, I. Lewis Libby, misrepresented to the media the scope and nature of what the U.S. intelligence community knew and didn’t know about Saddam Hussein’s weapons programs before the war.

It is self-evident that the Administration cannot investigate itself in this matter. I therefore urge you to expand the Special Counsel’s investigation to include these matters crucial to our national security and national integrity.”

For full text of the letter to the Deputy Attorney General

http://www.house.gov/apps/list/press/ny08_nadler/FitzgeraldwarMemo102005.html)

Impeachment

An impeachment procedure could be undermined by the Administration in a number of ways.

We recall, in this regard, how Clinton launched punitive bombing raids on the Sudan and Afghanistan on the day Monica Lewinsky was summoned before a grand jury in August 1998. The bombing raids immediately contributed to deflecting attention from the issue of impeachment. (August 21, 1998). Similarly, a few months later, December 16, 1998, Clinton ordered the bombing of Iraq. The bombs were dropped on Baghdad on the very same day as the launching of an impeachment motion in the House of Representatives. Overriding the UN Security Council, Sec of State Madeleine Albright had ordered the withdrawal of UN weapons inspectors, who left Iraq on December 15th, a day prior to the impeachment motion.

To galvanize public support, Cheney and Rumsfeld could take the opportunity of the UN report into the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, to launch (in collaboration with Israel) punitive bombings against Syria. Military action against Syria is already contemplated and has been part of the US military agenda since 2003.

An impeachment process directed against Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld et al. would inevitably undermine the entire neoconservative construct. It would also backlash on the Pentagon's top military brass. If criminal charges are laid, Vice President Cheney would be one of the main targets:

The Oct. 11 grand jury appearance by New York Times reporter Judith Miller has shifted the focus of attention to Cheney's office. Miller's hour-long testimony, according to news accounts, focussed on a third meeting that she had with Cheney's chief of staff Lewis "Scooter" Libby in June 2003—a month prior to the publication of Valerie Plame's name in a Robert Novak syndicated column. Plame, the wife of former Ambassador Joseph Wilson IV, was "outed" by Novak as a CIA officer. Novak reported that he had been given Plame's name by two "senior administration officials," now widely believed to be Libby and President Bush's chief political counsel Karl Rove.

However, Fitzgerald's probe, from the outset, has centered on an obscure but powerful White House unit, the White House Iraq Group, which was constituted in July-August 2002, to coordinate all Bush-Cheney Administration efforts to win support for an Iraq invasion. Rove and Libby, along with White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, her deputy Stephen Hadley, White House Counsellor Karen Hughes, and a half-dozen other White House and NSC senior staffers were all part of the WHIG. (See [Jeffrey Steinberg](#))

In the eventuality of criminal charges and/or an impeachment procedure, a national emergency could be used to suspend the legal procedures required to carry out the indictments against key Bush administration officials.

In other words, the Administration could use a national disaster as a pretext for Martial law, in which case all criminal charges would be thwarted through the (temporary) suspension of constitutional government. Under a Code Red alert, US Northern Command (NORTHCOM) would take over the functions of civilian administration.

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