

The FBI's New Power

The Authority to Abuse the Constitution

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On August 4, ignoring former House Speaker Newt Gingrich who had spoken of Bush's "phony war" on terrorism, Congress authorized vast authority for repressive agencies to spy further on the public. Under the pretext of "fighting terror," the bill opens further already existing wide parameters for telephone and email intrusion without court warrants.

As usual, Democrats capitulated. Some fearing the wuss label, others actually agreeing that Bush needed more power to diminish the already diminishing Bill of Rights to deal with the "terrorist threat." 41 House Democrats voted for the Bill, 16 in the Senate.

Congress refuses to learn. In 1947, President Truman launched a bipartisan coalition to create new agencies to deal with the then mortal enemy the Soviet Union. Although Democrats launched the Cold War, some liberals began to object when extreme right wing Republicans like Senator Joe McCarthy took Truman's anti-Communist crusade "too far."

Like the Cold War, Bush's anti-terrorism campaign increased the already vast powers of the secret agencies. Did Congress not recall that the most notorious spies were high employees FBI and CIA officials? The Bureau's Joseph Hansen and the Agency's Aldrich Ames sold the Soviets hundreds of thousands of "top secrets" before the USSR collapsed in 1991. Simultaneously those agencies spent fortunes spying on innocent citizens.

Worse, FBI "informants" often doubled as "agents provocateurs." In the 1960s, anti war and civil rights activists learned to suspect those proposing violence and labeling skeptics "chickenshit." Such advocates regularly turned out to be FBI infiltrators. I recall a meeting during which one man screamed: "Let's kill a pig. That'll wake people up and show 'em, we mean business." Inevitably, such statements gained the support of a few nuts and indeed some violent scenarios actually took shape.

By placing such characters inside the anti-Vietnam War and Civil Rights movements, the Bureau hoped to provoke violence so as to show the public that anti-war and civil rights activists were dangerous. Most citizens opposed the war and sympathized with anti-war protests, but drew a sharp line at violence.

I recall at anti-Vietnam War meetings insisted on violent action as the only means could to bring about radical transformation. Later, I learned the cops had busted him on drug charges and turned him over to the FBI, who offered to drop the charges in return for his inciting groups to commit mayhem.

Some of these "turned criminals" just infiltrated left groups and reported to their Special Agents about their plans and activities. From 1968-1973, the FBI placed 72 "informants"

inside the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. A few of the infiltrators volunteered for such work out of patriotic feelings. One such informant worked for Karl Hess, a former Goldwater speechwriter and Libertarian. After spending a month at IPS, the informant confessed to Hess that he had permeated the Institute in order to report on its subversive activities. But he felt qualms after finding not one sign of unpatriotic activity. Indeed, he discovered lively debate, few agreements among fellows and not a trace of Soviet influence. As a result of his disclosure IPS filed suit and won a court order for the FBI to stop their illegal practices and not circulate material on IPS to other government agencies. In the late 1980s, IPS fellows discovered that the FBI had turned a book keeper and a janitor whose relatives faced felony charges. IPS endured the consequences when the bookkeeper failed to pay payroll taxes for several months and serious financial problems ensued.

Congress has virtually ignored the FBI's role as a political police and allowed the Bureau to maintain its façade of fighting crime. Since the FBI did not get punished for using informants to provoke crimes, this MO clung like a dingleberry to the Bureau.

Even before J. Edgar Hoover became director of the FBI in 1924, he had made his name by pursuing political radicals. In 1919-1920, he became a right hand man to Attorney General J. Mitchell Palmer, who carried out the notorious "Palmer Raids" against "radical aliens."

Hoover built a PR apparatus that profiled his organization as tough on crime, while he collected massive amounts of data on everyone he could, including Members of Congress. Given this knowledge of the FBI's past wiretapping and data collecting of hundreds of thousands of innocent US citizens, one would have thought Congress might have reflected before authorizing the current bill, which expands the power of the Bureau and other agencies, opening the door to perfidy on a grander scale.

Instead, the Members, some of whom feared getting labeled "soft on terrorism," voted carte blanche for the repressive agencies to "pursue terrorists." In the FBI's case, this means not only snooping into private affairs, but using agents provocateurs to create crime where none existed.

On June 22, 2006, FBI Special Agents arrested seven African American men and accused them of conspiring to unleash a ground war against US targets. Five had previous arrest records for assault and possession of illegal drugs and weapons. Federal prosecutors told the media that this nefarious gang had links to al-Qaida and planned to blow up Chicago's Sears Tower in "support of a foreign terrorist organization."

Most of the "plotters," residents of the Liberty City area, where some half a million African Americans share decaying space with recently-arrived Haitians, were unemployed. The announcement of the arrest came in the context of police busts in England where local terrorist cells also had supposed links to al-Qaida. When some reporters scrutinized the evidence, however, it turned out that the arrested men had no connection to some supposed central headquarters of the infamous world terrorist plotters.

In England, angry local Muslims had learned bomb making not in the mosques, but on web sites. More than a dozen such sites existed even before 9/11. Thousands now exist.

The FBI, however, fell behind technologically, failing even to obtain proper computer interfaces. It still lacks sufficient Arabic-speaking Agents who would be able to surf the Web

and find some of the illicit sites.

Throughout this country, millions of black Muslims resent the dominant culture. Alongside them, immigrants from the Muslim world now inhabit neighborhoods inside cities and in the suburbs. So, the FBI resorted to its old tricks.

In Miami, however, the FBI targeted a group whose members had no knowledge of bomb-making; nor possessed sufficient computer literacy to search the web. Two paid FBI informants discovered Narseal “Prince Marina” Batiste. According to the indictments and court testimony, they posed as al-Qaida members and approached Batiste with a grandiose plan that he would lead. At “secret” meetings at a warehouse the FBI had wired for surveillance and even paid rent on the place, the infiltrators shared joints with Batiste and his buddies. It isn’t clear from court records if the FBI also paid for the marijuana it supplied “plotters” who smoked while conspiring.

The 32 year old Batiste had heard of al-Qaida, but wasn’t sure what it stood for. The FBI instigators made Batiste swear loyalty to al-Qaida; then had him call on his local buddies to form an “Islamic army” in Miami. None had military training. Some could barely read. But Batiste assured the group in the midst of its collective marijuana buzz of greatness ahead.

One of the paid FBI informers, Charles James Stewart, had gotten busted for rape. After he joined the group he fought with and killed one of Batiste’s friends. Then he testified against the entire group.

The other undercover plant born in the Middle East — had a record for assault and marijuana possession. The FBI had promised him citizenship papers if he came through successfully.

The terrorists included five U.S. citizens, one Haitian with a green card and one without. The FBI infiltrators promised Batiste and his seven man army boots, uniforms, guns, radios, vehicles and \$50 thousand. Imagine how these poor men felt when army boots and some primitive electronic equipment appeared, including a small digital camera, a cell phone and \$3,500 in cash!

The FBI never supplied weapons or explosives. The money was a bit short of the \$50,000 the informers boasted they would provide. None of the group knew how to use explosives or had formal weapons training.

When the public learned of the pathetic nature of these dangerous terrorists, FBI Deputy Director John Pistole explained that the conspiracy was “more inspirational than operational.” Yes, FBI informants inspired the plot with non-operational conspirators, as they did in previous eras against different enemies.

Congress has just authorized more money and power to an agency that will no doubt use it to collect more files on US citizens and perpetrate more Miami style plots in the name of the “war on terrorism,” Members of both House should enjoy their summer!

Saul Landau writes a regular column for CounterPunch and progresoweekly.com. His new Counterpunch Press book is [A BUSH AND BOTOX WORLD](#). His new film, WE DON’T PLAY GOLF HERE (on globalization in Mexico) is available through roundworldproductions@gmail.com

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