

Internment Camps and Authoritarian US Fast Becoming Reality

By Ritt Goldstein

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America as you know it is changing dramatically. The democratic freedoms which long defined American life are under siege. Today's Bush administration is moving towards America's military pursuing law enforcement, internment camps are on the horizon, and a member of the US Civil Rights Commission previously broached Arab-American internment. As the FBI pursues an unprecedented investigation of Senators for leaking the truth,¹ Bureau monitoring of domestic dissent and internet traffic has intimidated many into comparative silence. Concurrently, the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) poses an unseen threat to the America we know, recalling a darkly obscure side of recent US history.

Hidden behind FEMA's benevolent face as the body whose chief responsibility is disaster relief, another FEMA exists. It is a FEMA that few know has been "charged by the Bush Administration with leading the nation's anti-terrorism effort", and a FEMA whose history includes nightmarish episodes in this vein.

The birth of FEMA's dark side originated in secret during the Reagan administration. FEMA's domestic disaster management role was then broadened to allow it to practice for the imposition of martial law and the internment of so-called aliens and radicals. During this period, a joint exercise was held with the military to prepare for such a contingency, Rex-84. Concurrently, FEMA began assembling files on those whom the Agency might target.

Today, most Americans know only FEMA's benevolent side. However, in a little known move, President Bush returned FEMA (headed by former Bush/Cheney 2000 campaign manager Joe Allbaugh) to the forefront of national security, in May 2001 designating FEMA as the agency in charge of terrorism response.

Under President Bush's newly released "National Strategy For Homeland Security", FEMA would be placed under the Office of Homeland Security.² Both Homeland Security and the Department of Defense planned to participate "in homeland security training that involves military and civilian emergency response", provoking comparison to Rex-84. And now, the Bush administration is moving to give FEMA disturbing new responsibilities.

On 14 August the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article entitled "Camps for Citizens: Ashcroft's Hellish Vision",³ relating to Attorney General John Ashcroft's announced desire to create "camps for US citizens he deems to be 'enemy combatants'". The *Los Angeles Times* article reported that Ashcroft aides "have indicated that a 'high-level committee' will recommend which citizens are to be stripped of their constitutional rights and sent to Ashcroft's new camps". Footnoting events, on 15 July *NewsMax.com* reported that FEMA is said to be pursuing a "crash effort" to build "sprawling temporary cities to handle millions". The *NewsMax* report⁴ also noted that FEMA indicated the temporary cities are for those fleeing weapons of mass destruction. It added that FEMA had been given a deadline of having the cities "ready to go by January 2003." And in a subsequent posting to the *NewsMax.com* website,⁵ a copy of FEMA's project particulars noted that those contractors seeking to participate in the program "must demonstrate capability of establishing group housing developments (designing, developing, constructing, and acquisition of property) and maintenance of complex(s) for periods exceeding 2 years".

NewsMax.com states that FEMA spokesman Chad Koltun has confirmed some portions of their story, challenging others. On 7 August *NewsMax* reported⁶ "Let me state for the record that FEMA is moving ahead with plans to create temporary cities that could handle millions of Americans . . ."

While FEMA has no domestic intelligence apparatus of its own to presently target those deemed suspect, FEMA's Operation TIPS stated aim was to recruit "millions of American workers" to report "suspicious activity". But as the TIPS program became public knowledge, a broad spectrum of Americans voiced substantive concern that whomever an eager TIPS volunteer might somehow deem "suspicious" would be labeled "suspect", harshly treated as such by US authorities.

At present, US media highlights the occasional strip-search of elderly women, the routine targeting of those who appear of Arabic or South Asian extraction, and an ongoing stream of "terrorist alerts" by US authorities. Individuals have been questioned by the FBI over "suspicious posters", academics disciplined for "improper" discussions of current events, and a substantive number of innocent individuals have endured public transportation nightmares in the name of security. With US law enforcement now free to engage in previously prohibited spying on domestic political and religious groups, many consider America's most basic freedoms under siege.

Sounding a warning, Gregory Nojeim, Associate Director of the American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU) Washington office, said the ACLU is "very concerned about the government's apparently insatiable appetite for new powers and new measures that threaten basic American liberties as set forth in the Constitution." Nojeim also warned that, "military law enforcement jeopardizes rights at the most fundamental level because soldiers are trained to kill the enemy, not to make arrests". Sure to inflame concern further, FEMA has a much discredited, but relatively unknown history of compiling dossiers on those it might seek to intern.

According to research compiled by investigative authors Ward Churchill and Jim Vander Wall,⁷ before FEMA's dossier effort became extensive, FBI intervention halted it. The dossier episode detonated when the FBI challenged FEMA's right to pursue domestic

spying, resulting in FEMA's turning over "12,000 political dossiers" to the Bureau. In a dark reflection of that period, FEMA's Operation TIPS had been designed as a vehicle where citizen informant's reports would be "maintained and analyzed in a single (TIPS) database" for future reference and/or action, according to the Department of Justice (DOJ).

Earlier, President Bush had ensured there would be no current FBI/FEMA conflict, mandating that FEMA work closely with the DOJ (of which the FBI is part), creating what Bush called a "seamlessly integrated" network. With this bond between FEMA and the DOJ, the Administration effectively voided the inter-departmental checks which stopped FEMA's earlier abuses.

According to the Department of Homeland Security, FEMA "will continue to change the emergency management culture from one that reacts to terrorism, to one that proactively helps communities and citizens avoid becoming victims". Paradoxically, FEMA's prior debacle was a direct outgrowth of its pursuit of proactive methods, its attempt to legitimize the assumption of extraordinary powers under the very cloak of "counterterrorism".

At the time of those abuses, then FBI Director William Webster objected to FEMA's pursuing domestic intelligence under the veil of counterterrorism. Appreciating the validity of Webster's complaint, alarmed as to both the aim and scope of FEMA's excesses, then Attorney General William French Smith charged that there were "serious policy and legal objections to an 'emergency czar' role for FEMA." Smith also conveyed alarm regarding a drift into an effective exaggeration of events, circumstances allowing what he termed "the expansion of the definition of severe emergencies to encompass 'routine' domestic law enforcement emergencies", thus engaging FEMA's extraordinary powers.

Details of FEMA's national security role first emerged during the Reagan-era Iran-Contra scandal. Iran-Contra involved the clandestine selling of weapons to Iran, illegally using the proceeds to fund US backed Central American insurgents, the Contras. It was an episode that led to felony convictions for some of the Reagan administration's key figures, such as John Poindexter and Elliott Abrams, both of whom are in the present Bush administration, as are others from that period.

As one of his last acts as President, Bush Sr. pardoned those still implicated by the scandal. Others, such as John Poindexter and Oliver North, had their convictions reportedly reversed on the basis of "congressional immunity".

Reagan's legacy also included the US's so-called "Dirty Wars" in Central America, what has been called the creation of the region's "killing fields". It was a time marred by members of the Reagan administration engaging in both questionable and criminal activities, pursued in the name of National Security. It is against this backdrop that FEMA's controversial roles and powers were drafted, powers which also provided for the Government to be administered solely by the President and FEMA alone.

According to the *Washington Post*, the creation of a US "shadow government" was also a part of the Reagan initiatives. When the *Post* revealed the shadow government's existence on 1 March 2002, ⁸ the Bush administration explained it as a precaution to ensure the continuation of government in case of a terrorist attack. But on 2 March the *Post* ran a

subsequent headline,⁹ that the US Congress had been unaware the shadow government existed. However, present law does provide for the Speaker of the House, followed by the President of the Senate, to assume the presidency should both the President and Vice President become unable to perform their duties. Should the Constitution be suspended, control of the country pass to the President and FEMA alone, succession provisions remain beyond public record. In this context, it should also be noted that the shadow government is physically located within a FEMA facility.

Reagan initiated the roots of today's extraordinary concerns in the period when he was California's governor. In 1971 Reagan reportedly inaugurated the idea of utilizing the military and law enforcement to combat dissent, creating the California Specialized Training Institute (CSTI), a "counterterrorism training center". Reagan also appointed a retired National Guard general, Louis Giuffrida, as his "emergency czar". It was at this time that Giuffrida developed plans for martial law, plans which were never implemented, but which were reportedly designed to "legitimize the arrest and detention of anti-Vietnam war activists and other political dissidents".

When Reagan became President, Giuffrida was appointed to head FEMA, promptly opening a "Civil Defense Training Center" based on CSTI. FEMA also worked with the Pentagon, their joint position paper, "The Civil/Military Alliance in Emergency Management", an early exploration into the effective use of the military for law enforcement purposes, a precursor to America's present debate regarding the military's role.

At FEMA, Giuffrida worked with Oliver North, the central figure of Iran-Contra, in developing FEMA's then emerging scope and powers. According to a 1990 report authored by Diana Reynolds,¹⁰ presented by the liberal think-tank Political Research Associates, the resulting Reagan initiatives were designed to "change civil defense planning into a military/police version of civil society", a charge with particularly current resonance today.

It was paradoxically 1984 when FEMA mounted its national exercise with the Department of Defense, its exercise to prepare for the arrest and detention of so-called aliens and radicals, Rex-84. The exercise's purpose was to test military capabilities in anticipation of "civil disturbances, major demonstrations", incidentally illustrating the evolution of civil defense into civil control.

At present, the final contents and disposition of the Reagan security initiatives, part of a national crisis plan, remains beyond public knowledge. But given the "War On Terror's" scope, even if a formal crisis is not declared, speculation exists that a *de facto* drift into an effective deployment of FEMA's crisis powers could occur. And this February, the former FEMA executive, John Brinkerhoff, who reportedly drafted the martial law/internment portions of the national crisis plan, revealed it was "approved by Reagan, and actions were taken to implement it."

Footnotes:

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<http://www.counterpunch.org/homeland1.html>
Part I: Phoenix, Chaos, The Enterprise, and the Politics of Terror in America
Part II: Phoenix And The Anatomy Of Terror
Part III: Chaos And Political Terrorism In America
Part IV: The Terrorism Account Goes Underground
Part V: The Turning Point
Part VI: The Counter-Terror Network
Part VII: The Last Decade
Footnotes
See Also: "Flight of the Phoenix: From Vietnam to Homeland Security
An Open Letter to Maj. Gen. Bruce Lawlor," by Douglas Valentine, 8/25/02
<http://counterpunch.org/valentine0824.html>
3. "**Camps for Citizens: Ashcroft's Hellish Vision, Attorney general shows himself as a menace to liberty,**" by Jonathan Turley, *Los Angeles Times*, 14 August 2002, <http://www.ratical.org/ratville/CAH/CfCAHV.html>
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5. "**Draft FEMA Bid Notice,**" replica of the draft bid proposal on FEMA's website, *NewsMax.com*, <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2002/8/6/182408.shtml>
6. "**FEMA's Plan for Mass Destruction Attacks: Of Course It's True,**" by Christopher Ruddy, *NewsMax.com*, 7 August 2002, <http://www.newsmax.com/archives/articles/2002/8/6/183147.shtml>
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<http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/JohnJudge/911mar2002.html#0303b>
9. "**Congress Not Advised Of Shadow Government, Bush Calls Security 'Serious Business',**" by Amy Goldstein and Juliet Eilperin, *Washington Post*, 2 Mar 2002, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A26212-2002Mar1?language=printer>
<http://www.ratical.org/ratville/JFK/JohnJudge/911mar2002.html#0303c>
10. "**The Rise of the National Security State: FEMA and the NSC,**" by Diana Reynolds, *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, #33, Winter 1990, http://www.publiceye.org/liberty/fema/Fema_0.htm