

Bush creates new FBI spy unit—further step towards a secret police force

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7 July 2005

On June 29, President Bush approved changes in the American intelligence apparatus that signal a further erosion of democratic rights in the US. The measures will set up a new spy unit within the FBI, strengthen the hand of the CIA and expand the powers of the newly created office of the Director of National Intelligence—all under the guise of prosecuting the “war on terror.”

Bush directed the changes following a study by White House Homeland Security advisor Frances Fragos Townsend, who had been tasked with implementing intelligence restructuring recommendations of the so-called WMD commission led by Republican Laurence Silberman and Democratic Senator Charles Robb (Virginia). Bush has so far endorsed 70 of the commission’s 74 recommendations.

The changes were unveiled at a Justice Department press conference by Attorney General Alberto Gonzales and FBI Director Robert Mueller. Delivered the same day that Bush went to Fort Bragg, North Carolina to give his speech on the Iraq war, the announcement was largely ignored by the mass media.

At the heart of the reorganization is the creation of a new National Security Service (NSS) within the FBI, which will specialize in intelligence and follow priorities laid out by John Negroponte, who was appointed by Bush in February as Director of National Intelligence (DNI). The DNI is charged with centralizing and coordinating the work of 15 separate civilian and military intelligence agencies, including the CIA and Pentagon spying operations.

Civil liberties advocates warned that the establishment of the National Security Service could lead to the abrogation of constitutional protections against domestic political spying and repression. Timothy H. Edgar, American Civil Liberties Union

policy counsel for national security, commented, “Spies and cops have different roles and operate under different rules for a very important reason: to ensure that our law enforcement agencies stay within the Constitution. This proposal could erode the FBI’s law enforcement ethic and put parts of the FBI under the effective control of a spymaster who reports to the president—not the attorney general.”

The combining of counterintelligence, counterterrorism and spying into one FBI office linked to the CIA and under the direction of a DNI working directly for the White House represents a major step toward the creation of an American secret police force. Such a force can be utilized to spy upon and repress domestic social unrest and political opposition, and its establishment poses a real threat that the methods of Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo are to be brought home to the US itself.

Gen. Michael Hayden, Negroponte’s deputy, made clear the ominous implications of this integration of spying operations. “This is something we’ve not done before as nation,” Hayden said. “We can no longer survive with such a gap between foreign and domestic [intelligence]. Our enemy does not recognize that distinction.” The closing of this “gap” is in direct legal violation of the National Security Act of 1947, which bans the CIA and military intelligence from engaging in domestic spying and covert operations.

The reorganization proposed by the Bush administration gives Negroponte control over most of the FBI’s \$3 billion intelligence budget and as-yet undefined authority over about half of the bureau’s 11,000 agents. The proposal also gives the spy chief the power to approve the hiring of the FBI’s top national security official and to communicate on intelligence matters through this official with FBI agents and

analysts in the field.

As part of the new plan, Attorney General Gonzales will also consolidate several intelligence and counterterrorism operations at the Justice Department into a new national security division. Bush will ask Congress to authorize the hiring of a new assistant attorney general to run this division, which will “centralize responsibility for intelligence and national security matters at the Department of Justice in a single office,” according to a White House fact sheet.

Leading figures at the FBI have reportedly voiced vigorous opposition to the changes, which are seen as a move by the White House to consolidate the power of the office of the Director of National Intelligence. But Gonzales and FBI Director Mueller tried to downplay these interagency conflicts, with Mueller commenting, “The development of the National Security Service is the next step in the evolution of our ability to protect the American public.”

The changes at the FBI and Justice Department are the latest in a series of measures adopted by the Bush administration in the wake of 9/11 whose effect has been to strengthen domestic spying operations and curtail democratic rights of citizens and non-citizens alike. These measures, which have received enthusiastic bipartisan Congressional support, have included the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and passage of the USA Patriot Act.

The establishment of the National Security Service at the FBI, along with the other proposals made by the White House last Wednesday, was in line with the Intelligence Reform Act approved by Congress last December, which also created Negroponte’s intelligence “czar” position. Congressional Democrats and Republicans have overwhelmingly supported the Bush administration’s claims that these changes are required to prevent future terrorist attacks on US soil.

Other new initiatives announced by Bush include the establishment of a National Counter Proliferation Center, also under the control of Negroponte, to analyze intelligence on the spread of suspected WMDs, including nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. The new unit will replace the CIA-dominated Counterproliferation Center, but covert actions planned by the center will remain under the authority of the CIA. Bush also issued an executive order that authorizes the government to freeze assets of

individuals or groups allegedly involved in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

Bush also placed the office of CIA chief Porter Goss in charge of all overseas human intelligence work. According to Michael Hayden, a senior CIA official will become “the national humint [human intelligence] manager,” coordinating the international spying activities of the CIA, Pentagon and FBI. Pentagon operatives, who clandestinely visit countries to gather intelligence as part of battlefield preparations, have previously done this without prior CIA knowledge.

The Pentagon also operates a little-known initiative called the Partnership to Defeat Terrorism. This operation brings together an international collection of business leaders, think tanks and academics to develop an information-sharing base for the ostensible purpose of protecting critical sectors of infrastructure—including buildings, roads, industrial facilities and financial computer systems—from terrorist attack. Commissioned by Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, it currently operates as part of the Defense Department’s Strategic Command, but the *Washington Post* reports that senior intelligence officials in other agencies question whether it should remain under Pentagon control.



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