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Revelations of Pre-September 11 Warnings Require PATRIOT ACT Repeal

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Revelations of Pre-September 11 Warnings Require PATRIOT ACT Repeal

By Peter Erlinder

ST. PAUL, MN.—The storm of questions and criticism following revelations that the Bush Administration had numerous warnings of an impending hijacking attack before the September 11 tragedy have focused primarily on the Nixon-era mantra, "what did he know, and when did he know it?" But, even if a Congressional investigation agrees with Bush Administration protestations that the warnings weren't specific enough to know what to do, Bush Administration policy AFTER September 11 is going to require some explaining, too.

The "lack of specific warnings" defense may justify a lack of action before the airliners hit the World Trade Center, but it can't explain away the lies that were told to Congress and the American people after September 11, to justify the Bush Administration's "war on civil liberties." The recent disclosures reveal that the Bush Administration has been cynically using their own failure to act on intelligence developed under then-existing laws to justify vastly increasing their own power at the expense of civil liberties.

Within a month of September 11, Ashcroft packaged an old FBI "wish list" as the USA/PATRIOT ACT and demanded Congress pass it without discussion, because of the threat of yet another "Pearl Harbor-like attack". He told us the Administration needed new "tools" to prevent "unexpected" terrorist attacks --- new wiretap authority... secret searches...the use of secret evidence....secret immigration hearings....taping lawyer conversations...locking up "undesirables" on his command, the list goes on.

We were told that civil liberties questions and abuse of power concerns had to be shelved because of the "unexpected" new threat by no less an expert than Supreme Court Justice O'Connor. Members of Congress have been accused of being the next thing to "traitors" for questioning Administration policy and have even been forcibly expelled from Ashcroft's "secret" immigration hearings. Thousands have been locked up and deported without finding any "terrorists" and our allies are objecting to holding prisoners in violation of international law.

The press has been cut off from normal access to government information by Presidential decree. Local law enforcement is being "deputized" for federal immigration duty and Ashcroft is indicting lawyers who represent "terrorist" clients a bit too independently. Even at the state level, in places like Minnesota, local law enforcement has gotten on the "more tools" band wagon with state "anti-terrorism" bills that ape the Ashcroft proposals and actually go beyond them.

All of this has been justified in the name of preventing another "surprise attack". All of these attacks on American civil liberties have occurred long after the Bush Administration had incontrovertible evidence that the law enforcement and intelligence "tools" that were in place before September 11 were very effective, IF the Administration had known how to use them.

Now we know that we were all deceived, after the September 11 tragedy proved that existing investigative powers were effective, Bush and Company used their own failure to act on the warnings the had received to justify grabbing even more power...at the expense of our civil liberties, by deceiving Congress and the American people.

The USA/PATRIOT ACT became law in less than a month, without any hearings. Now that we know it was passed under false pretenses, Congress should repeal it just as quickly. And, the Bush Administration should rescind the policies that diminish our civil liberties, until we can get an honest
assessment of what went wrong in the months before September 11.

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