

# Four Decades of ‘Crisis Management’: Precedents for Incoming Bush Team

by Edward Spannaus

Two months into the new Reagan-Bush Administration, on March 22, 1981, the *Washington Post* ran a front-page story with the headline: “Bush To Head Crisis Management.” The article reported that after weeks of bureaucratic in-fighting, “it has been decided that Vice President Bush will be placed in charge of a new structure for national security crisis management. . . . This assignment will amount to an unprecedented role for a vice president in modern times.” And the article noted that during the Carter Administration, “the crisis management structure was chaired by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the National Security Adviser.”

The *Post* article went on to say that Bush would chair meetings in the White House Situation Room in times of crisis; these meetings were to include the Secretaries of Defense and State, the CIA Director, the National Security Adviser, and top White House officials.

Interestingly, the lead article of the *Washington Post* that day, adjacent to the article on Bush and crisis management, was on the crisis in Europe, and it began by reporting that “President Reagan’s National Security Adviser, Richard V. Allen, said yesterday that the Western alliance is threatened by a ‘grave economic crisis’ in Western Europe” and by the revival of pacifism in Europe.

To help in understanding the danger today of the imposition of a “crisis-management” regime utilizing dictatorial, or rule-by-decree methods, by the new Bush Administration, it is useful to examine some of the precedents for this in recent American history. Within the past 40 years, plans for martial law, rule by decree, and even suspending the Constitution, have been on the books—under conditions far less severe than the financial and economic collapse which the incoming George W. Bush Administration will face.

## 1960s: Plans For Martial Law

Perhaps the best known, at least in earlier decades, were the plans for the imposition of martial law which developed during the civil disturbances of the 1960s, with the violent rioting in major American cities, and mass demonstrations by the civil rights and anti-war movements.

Federal troops had been deployed a number of times in 1962-63 in the South in response to violence-directed against

civil rights protesters, or to enforce school desegregation. But before long, the use of the military took on a much different character.

In 1963, the Joint Chiefs of Staff designated the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army to be in charge of civil disturbance matters, and the Continental Army Command was made responsible for the selection and deployment of troops in such situations.

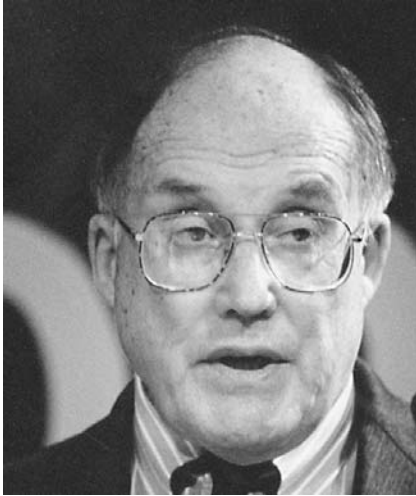
The formal military command for dealing with domestic civil disturbances was called CINCSTRIKE (Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Strike Command), headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Florida (now headquarters for the U.S. Special Operations Command). Planning for the CINCSTRIKE operation took place in the U.S. Intelligence Board, consisting of representatives of all U.S. intelligence agencies, but heavily weighted toward the military intelligence services.

Between 1965 and 1967, there were 108 major riots and disorders, with the largest number in 1967. National Guard forces were deployed 36 times during this period; U.S. Army troops were deployed once, in Detroit, and were pre-positioned for possible deployment a number of other times.

By 1967, the Army stepped up both its planning, and its intelligence-collection activities, involving extensive surveillance and infiltration of radical and protest organizations. Contingency plans were drawn up for possible commitment of Federal troops in 25 cities simultaneously. Among the better known of the plans for military takeover of specific areas, was “Garden Plot”—technically known as CINCSTRIKE OPLAN 563. A domestic war room, and 24-hour-a-day monitoring of civil disturbances were components of “Garden Plot.”

From around 1967 forward, the man in charge of intelligence gathering was Maj. Gen. William P. Yarborough, the U.S. Army Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence (ASCI).

Yarborough had often expressed the view in the mid- to late-1960s that the United States was on the verge of revolution, and more recently he was reported to have said that it was time for the American people to be told how close America was to civil war in the 1960s, and how extensive was the military preparation for this.



*Current Chief Justice William Rehnquist was, in the 1960s, one of the Nixon Administration's key officials planning for "qualified martial law" against civil or economic unrest.*

Yarborough does not appear to have been alone in this view. For example, the Department of the Army's Civil Disturbance Plan, published in February 1968, warned about civil disturbances beyond the control of local and state authorities, arising out of the anti-Vietnam War movement and the civil rights movement. These could lead to "violent attacks upon the social order," and, over time, could lead to "a situation of true insurgency should external subversive forces develop successful control of the situation."

"Federal military intervention may be ordered to save life and property, alleviate suffering, and restore law and order," the plan stated.

In May 1968, Yarborough's office issued an Information Collection Plan for the Army which warned that "purveyors of violence" were exploiting the "anti-war and racial movements," with the aims of "social disintegration, chaos, violence, destruction, insurrection, and revolution."

After the first of many public exposures in early 1970, Congressional hearings began, and the Army intelligence collection program began to be shut down. Congressional hearings were continued in 1971, and eventually fed into the post-Watergate Congressional investigations of U.S. domestic intelligence operations in 1975-76.

### **Rehnquist: 'Qualified Martial Law'**

Lest you think that this is all ancient history, consider the following: One of the key officials in the Nixon Justice Department, involved in planning and coordination with the Department of Defense regarding civil disturbances, was the man who is now the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court: William Rehnquist.

A review of civil disturbance planning, compiled by the General Counsel of the Department of the Army, cited a March 1969 memorandum by "Bill Rehnquist," described as "the first formal draft of the Civil Disturbance Plan."

That same year, in a public speech, Rehnquist described

anti-war protesters as "the new barbarians," and he urged: "We must be prepared, if necessary, to devote whatever energies are necessary, at whatever sacrifice to private gain or pleasure, to see that [the] essential values of our system are maintained."

After the mass arrests of protesters in May 1971, Rehnquist argued for the suspension of civil liberties in civil emergencies. "The doctrine which there obtains," he said, "is customarily referred to as 'qualified martial law.' In that situation, the authority of the nation, state or city . . . to protect itself and its citizens against actual violence or a real threat of violence is held to outweigh the normal right of any individual" to insist on his constitutional rights when arrested.

As the head of the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel (a position later occupied by Antonin Scalia), Rehnquist frequently appeared on Capitol Hill to defend Nixon Administration policies of domestic wiretapping and surveillance, no-knock police entries, and preventive detention. One scholar described Rehnquist's role in the Justice Department as "the resident legal theorist who finds within the crevices of constitutional law ample justification for whatever the President has wanted to do."

It is also useful to note, that the surveillance programs run by the military and the FBI in that period, were also coordinated with private business and fundamentalist religious organizations.

### **1970s: The Creation of FEMA**

After the 1960s military plans for martial law were shut down, new mechanisms were created during the 1970s, which culminated in the Reagan-Bush "crisis management" and "emergency preparedness" programs of the 1980s.

Planning for new forms of authoritarian rule began just as the old military/intelligence operations were being exposed and shoved back into the file cabinets. Two centers of preparations for what were expected to be two decades of crisis, were the New York Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) and the Trilateral Commission.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, soon to become President Carter's National Security Adviser, directed the Trilateral Commission's study on the "ungovernability" of modern democracies in the mid-1970s, which produced the book *The Crisis of Democracy*—predicting the "post-industrial" decline of democracy in Europe, Japan, and the United States. "This pessimism about the future of democracy has coincided with a parallel pessimism about the future of economic conditions," the report said.

Samuel Huntington, of more recent "Clash of Civilizations" fame, was a co-author of the Trilateral report, and he was also a project director of the CFR's "1980s Project"—which mapped out the "controlled disintegration" economic policy, a policy to be carried out by Carter's appointee to head the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker.



*Trilateral Commission provocateur Samuel Huntington, author of the “Clash of Civilizations” doctrine justifying warfare in the Mideast and Asia, was also the originator of FEMA.*

Out of these two projects came, among other things, the creation of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), during the Carter Administration. FEMA was created under Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) 32, with the mandate to maintain the “continuity of government” during emergency conditions. It was Samuel Huntington, as coordinator of security planning for the Carter-Brzezinski National Security Council, who actually drafted the Presidential Review Memorandum which created FEMA.

### **1980s: Reagan-Bush ‘Crisis Management’**

These Carter Administration measures set the stage for the creation of an extensive and tightly run “crisis management” structure in the early years of the Reagan-Bush Administration, as follows:

1. As described in the *Washington Post* article cited above, there was a brawl in the first few months of the Administration, between George Bush and Secretary of State Al “I’m-in-charge-here” Haig, over the control of crisis management. By March 1981, Bush had already been chosen to chair Situation Room crisis meetings, although the Presidential directive formalizing this had not yet been adopted. This was a reference to the Special Situation Group (SSG), the status of which was formalized in December of that year (see below).

2. On Dec. 4, 1981, President Reagan signed Executive Order 12333, which designated the National Security Council (NSC) as “the highest Executive branch entity” for review, guidance, and direction of *all* foreign intelligence, counterintelligence, and “special activities” (i.e., covert operations). This effectively put the NSC in charge of the CIA, military intelligence, special operations, and so on. This did not mean that the President’s National Security Adviser would assume

this charge, but the NSC staff structure—which is not a staff for the cabinet-level National Security Council, but for the White House—over which Bush increasingly assumed control.

A little-noticed provision of EO 12333 gave the CIA the exclusive conduct of “special activities” (covert operations), “unless the President determines that another agency is more likely to achieve a particular objective.” This, for the first time, officially opened the door for assigning covert operations to the NSC staff.

Furthermore, in a provision which was almost the “charter” for Bush’s secret government, Section 2.7 of EO 12333 permitted U.S. intelligence agencies to enter into secret contracts for services with “private companies or institutions.”

3. On Dec. 14, 1981, National Security Decision Directive Number 3 was signed. Entitled “Crisis Management,” it affirmed the existence of the Special Situation Group (SSG), which, it said, would be “chaired by the vice president,” and assigned to the SSG responsibility for crisis management. “Crisis Management” was defined as encompassing “a national security matter for which Presidential decisions and implementing instructions are required more rapidly than routine interdepartmental NSC staff support provides.” This formalized George Bush’s control.

4. On Jan. 12, 1982, NSDD-2 was issued, which formalized the National Security Council structure. It confirmed the existence of a series of Senior Interagency Groups (SIGs) for foreign policy, defense policy, and intelligence—thus reducing the power of the Secretary of State and other department heads.

5. On May 14, 1982, the first phase of the Bush takeover was completed, with the issuance of an extraordinary memorandum entitled “Crisis Pre-Planning,” by the National Security Adviser. Citing the authority of NSDD-3, this memorandum established an interagency, standing Crisis Pre-Planning Group (CPPG) subordinate to the SSG. The CPPG was created as a *standing* body, which would meet regularly, and develop plans and policies for the SSG.

The SSG-CPPG, under the direct control of the vice president, was given sweeping powers, giving it control over *any* area in which a *potential* crisis could emerge, and the authority to develop *preemptive policy options* for dealing with it.

This SSG-CPPG structure, according to contemporaneous documents, operated on the same level as the National Security Council, and was *above* the Secretary of State. But, in reality, it actually superseded the National Security Council. Secretary of State George Shultz vigorously protested—but was overridden.

It is worth noting that the May 12, 1982 memorandum directed each participating agency to provide the name of its CPPG representative to the CPPG coordinator—a Marine lieutenant colonel assigned to the White House named Oliver North, who was deeply involved in FEMA-type emergency planning at the time.

## A Domestic Dictatorship

Developing side-by-side with this White House crisis-management structure, was the “Continuity of Government,” or “emergency preparedness” program—also under George Bush’s control. The *Miami Herald*, in 1987, called the Continuity of Government program “a virtual parallel government,” and reported that it included a plan “to suspend the Constitution in the event of a national crisis.”

A *New York Times* article, on April 18, 1994, described the “Doomsday Project” as involving more than 20 highly classified “black programs,” in military and intelligence agencies; it also involved private companies run by retired military and intelligence personnel. The *Times* reported that, during the Reagan Administration, “the project was supervised by Vice President George Bush.”

Although very little has ever been disclosed about this program, one source is Oliver North, who, because of his later notoriety in what became known as “Iran-Contra,” took the opportunity to write a self-serving autobiography describing some of this.

North had been detailed to the National Security Council staff in August 1981. In his autobiography *Under Fire*, North describes “my first major assignment at the NSC” as involving contingency plans for enabling the President and the country’s leadership to continue to function and communicate in the event of nuclear war or other extraordinary disaster. North calls it simply, “The Project,” and says that this was “where I came to know George Bush.”

A public version of the same operation went under the label of “emergency preparedness,” and was the subject of an earlier Presidential directive, NSDD-47, signed in July 1982, in which North was also deeply involved. This revolved around FEMA, and included a secret interagency “continuity of government” committee made up of about 100 top government officials.

The first major exposure of this project was published in 1987, by the *Miami Herald*. “Lt. Col. Oliver North,” reported the *Herald*, “helped draw up a controversial plan to suspend the Constitution in the event of a national crisis, such as nuclear war, violent and widespread internal dissent, or national opposition to a U.S. military invasion abroad.”

The article reported that North assisted FEMA from 1982 to 1984 in revising contingency plans for dealing with nuclear war, insurrection, or massive military mobilization. North was involved in planning and running “readiness” exercises, which utilized scenarios involving domestic protests over U.S. military adventures abroad, or massive social unrest due to economic depression conditions following a global financial collapse.

It has been reported that then-CIA Director William Casey designated Charles Allen as the CIA’s representative to the COG project; Allen has been quoted as saying—perhaps somewhat whimsically—during a COG meeting: “Let’s see now. Our job is to throw the Constitution out the window.”

During the congressional Iran-Contra hearings in 1987, the issue of the “continuity of government” project came up in the following rather startling manner:

**Rep. Jack Brooks:** Colonel North, in your work at the NSC, were you not assigned at one time to work on plans for the continuity of government in the event of a major disaster?

**Chairman Sen. Daniel Inouye:** I believe the question touches upon a highly sensitive and classified area. So may I request that you not touch upon that, sir?

**Representative Brooks:** I was particularly concerned, Mr. Chairman, because I read in the Miami papers and several others that there had been a plan developed by that same agency, a contingency plan in the event of emergency that would suspend the American Constitution, and I was deeply concerned about it and wondered if that was the area in which he had worked. I believe that it was, but I wanted—

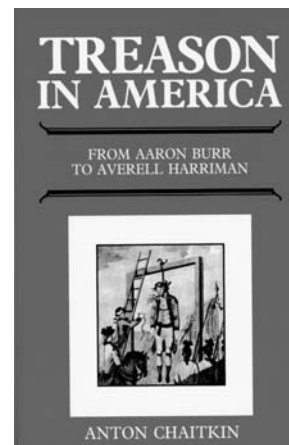
**Chairman Inouye:** May I most respectfully suggest that that matter not be touched upon at this stage? If we wish to get into this, I’m certain arrangements can be made for an Executive Session.

**Brendan Sullivan** (North’s lawyer): Well, I must say, the inferences from that statement are ridiculous.

**Chairman Inouye:** We’ll decide whether it’s ridiculous or not.

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