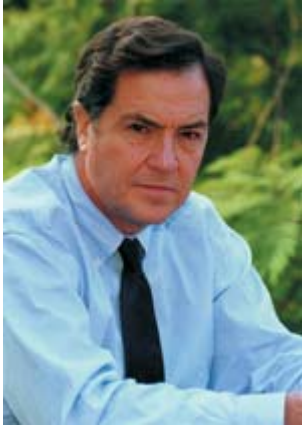


Paying the Price for Katrina and America's Shadow Government

by John W. Whitehead

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*"For they have sown the wind,
and they shall reap the
whirlwind."*— Hosea 8:7

As those ravaged by hurricane Katrina begin the slow and painstaking process of repairing their lives, it is time to assess how the federal government prepares for and deals with such

emergencies. This is especially so in light of the fact that in June of this year the Bush Administration reduced funding for the New Orleans District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers by a record \$71.2 million—an epic reduction for one fiscal year. As the Dolan Media news wire reported at the time, "The cuts mean major hurricane and flood protection projects will not be awarded to local engineering firms. Also, a study to determine ways to protect the region from a Category 5 hurricane has now been shelved."

Several things are readily apparent. First, Americans have lost control of their government. Besides the perfunctory act of voting—and only about half even do that—Americans have absolutely no voice in how their government operates. Second, those who wield governmental power often do not have our best interests at heart. This is no more clearly illustrated than by the shadow government known as FEMA and its black-op funding.

In 1979, President Carter signed an executive order that transferred many of the disaster relief agencies into one large agency known as the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA. After the events of 9/11, FEMA became one of the four major branches of the new Department of Homeland Security. Currently, FEMA has 2,500 full-time

employees and approximately 5,000 disaster-ready reservists.

FEMA is generally associated with natural disasters. However, the agency's actual purpose is much broader and includes any national emergency related to terrorism or civil unrest. Its professed purpose is to assure the survivability of the United States government.

Because disasters have the potential to create chaos, FEMA has expanded powers which are not given to any other government entity. It has the power to develop plans to take control of the mechanisms of production, distribution, energy sources, wages, salaries and the flow of money during a national emergency. FEMA is also empowered to take over modes of transportation, take control of the media as well as food resources, assume control at airports and seize and direct citizens. Congress is even prevented from reviewing these actions until six months after a state of national emergency has been declared. Thus, FEMA essentially has the power to put the Constitution on hold while trying to restore order in the wake of a perceived disaster—thus turning the country into a military state.

There is no doubt that FEMA needs the ability to obtain whatever resources are available when aiding in disaster relief. The problem is that all the power given to FEMA has come through presidential executive orders, rather than the legislative process, and has scuttled the representative process. As such, FEMA, which is run by unelected officials, will become the most powerful governmental authority figure during a time of national emergency.

Very few people, however, have ever heard of this powerful entity. On a rare occasion, FEMA will receive a few headlines when the agency organizes disaster relief for an earthquake or hurricane—such as with hurricane Katrina.

The one time FEMA did receive major media

attention was during the relief effort following hurricane Andrew in the early 1990s. After the hurricane, FEMA was called in to head up the relief efforts, but it lacked the resources to provide the proper level of assistance necessary. Because of FEMA's inadequate resources for such disasters, the agency fell under some scrutiny and secrets about the agency began to surface. What came out of the critical look was that FEMA was spending many times more for "black operations" (or black ops) than for disaster relief. Indeed, during the hurricane Andrew fiasco, it was discovered that FEMA had focused so much of its efforts on creating bunkers and preparing to protect the "chosen few" in case of a national emergency that it had only focused about six percent of its funding on what it was created for in the first place—actual preparation for a natural disaster. Even more disconcerting is that only a limited number of Congress members with top security clearance had any idea that FEMA was spending \$1.3 billion-plus of taxpayer money on secret, non-natural, black op projects.

While this money was being spent, the U.S. government was dramatically reducing its emphasis on war preparedness for the ordinary citizen, spending less than 50 cents per citizen by 1991.

Many critics believe that FEMA is a "shadow government" that will take over at any time. Because it is given very little media attention and essentially has no congressional accountability, there is very little we know about the official workings of FEMA. One thing is sure, FEMA does more than just provide relief after a natural disaster. Two separate but not necessarily mutually exclusive situations surrounding FEMA provide a better understanding of their power and the threat they may pose to civil liberties during a national emergency.

The first situation deals with the circumstances surrounding a little known exercise called Rex-84. After President Carter created FEMA, little was actually done to beef it up until Ronald Reagan took office. During Reagan's first year in office, he signed

a number of directives on civil defense policy and emergency mobilization preparedness to do just that.

During this time, Reagan also appointed Louis O. Giuffrida, a former national guard general, to head up FEMA. During Giuffrida's time as head of FEMA, he focused most of his attention on preventing domestic civil unrest and put concern for natural disaster and nuclear war relief to the side. By 1982, this emphasis on civil unrest had led to the creation of a joint FEMA-Pentagon paper known as "The Civil/Military Alliance in Emergency Management," which ignored portions of the Posse Comitatus Act in advocating for the use of the military in civil law enforcement. This new civil alliance gave the military and FEMA more emergency powers to acquire resources in an attempt to prevent domestic civil disturbances.

All this buildup led to the Rex-84 exercise, which was conducted in the spring of 1984. Rex-84 was essentially a secret training operation jointly run by FEMA and the Department of Defense to train 34 federal agencies on how to deal with domestic civil unrest. Some of the more notable agencies that were a part of Rex-84 included the CIA and the Secret Service. The training program anticipated civil disturbances, demonstrations and strikes that would hinder continuity of the government. To counter these disturbances, the military would be authorized to move groups of people, arrest segments of the population and impose martial law to regain continuity of government. The exercise envisioned at least 100,000 U.S. citizens, identified as national security threats, being rounded up and thrown into "containment" (or concentration) camps for unspecified periods. After the exercise was completed, then-U.S. Attorney General William Smith raised serious concerns about its legality.

The current Bush administration has ties with personnel from FEMA and Rex-84 during the Reagan administration. John Brinkerhoff, who played a major role in the martial law planning during Giuffrida's time as head of FEMA, is now with

the influential Anser Institute for Homeland Security. He has recently published a paper arguing for the legality of using military personnel on American streets. And the recent admission by the Bush administration about the existence of containment camps in the U.S. also raises concerns because these same training camps were part of the Rex-84 training.

Another aspect of FEMA is Mount Weather near Bluemont, Va., an underground bunker the size of a small city. This facility is one of a number sprinkled around the country which would allegedly be used in the case of a national emergency as a protective facility for high level government officials.

The Mount Weather bunker, which is built into the side of a mountain, contains a hospital, crematorium, dining and recreation areas, sleeping quarters, reservoirs of drinking and cooling water, an emergency power plant and a radio/television studio which is part of the Emergency Broadcasting System. Thus, in case of an emergency, the chosen elite will have a safe haven, while we taxpayers who foot the bill for such secret facilities are left on our own.

FEMA's role at the facility is allegedly to establish a "back up government" in case of a national disaster. Supposedly there is also an Office of the Presidency at Mount Weather, which is appointed by FEMA and regularly receives top secret national security information from all Federal departments and agencies.

The facility, for the most part, was a secret to everyone, including Congress, until a Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights hearing in 1975. During this hearing, some minimal information about the various facilities surfaced, but the specifics of these facilities are still a secret.

Senators were rebuffed in their quest for information about Mount Weather. For example, testifying before the Senate Subcommittee, Air Force General Leslie W. Bray said, "I am not at

liberty to describe precisely what is the role and the mission and the capability that we have at Mount Weather, or at any other precise location." Douglas Lea, subcommittee staff director, made these comments: "I don't understand what they are trying to hide out there. Mount Weather is just closed up to us. I don't believe there's been any effective Congressional control over the system." To this day, Congress still has no oversight, budgetary or otherwise, on the Mount Weather facility.

We are left with a host of questions. Is FEMA's broad security power really for national disasters? What is the real purpose of the massive underground bunkers? Why is FEMA unaccountable to our elected representatives? And do we really have a shadow government that answers to no one?

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