

Spying on the home front



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The United States has always held the claim that terrorism is bad and that nothing justifies terrorist acts. This view of terrorism has been objective since the U. S. did not have to deal with attacks on its home front. Because of this, freeing the world of terrorists had not been the United States' first priority.

Then on September 11, 2001, terrorists struck on U. S. soil. The attack on the World Trade Centers sent shock waves throughout the country. Questions of how this could happen were followed quickly with discussions on ways to stop this from ever happening again.

The Bush administration's cry of outrage began the ' war on terror'. Government agencies began searching for terrorists on U. S. soil and the home of the free began to change. Freedoms that United States citizens have long taken for granted were restricted. The Bush administration claimed that the executive powers of the government must be expanded in order to stop terrorism and win the ' war on terror'.

The Bush administration's eagerness to capture ' Al Qaeda' and win the ' war on terror' has caused the administration to set aside established laws that guarantee the rights and freedoms of U. S. citizens. According to the administration, it is a necessity but according to other lawmakers and legal minds, they have gone too far. To capture terrorists, the administration's first order of business was establishing The Patriot Act, which allows the government to investigate U. S.

citizens without the usual justifiable means. Then the administration brought in the NSA. " The National Security Agency (NSA) is the largest and most

secretive of U. S. intelligence agencies...its historic mission has been to gather communications intelligence on enemies abroad; a cardinal rule was 'hands off Americans at home'" (www. pbs.

rg/wgbh/pages/frontline/homefront/ preemption/nsa. html). That cardinal rule has changed via direct orders from the Bush administration. No one is off limits.

The NSA has wiretapped the phones and Internet communications of thousands of citizens without a warrant and without the individuals' knowledge. Since the terrorist attack on New York City, the government has received tips that ' Al Qaeda' is going to attack other cities. Train stations, bus stations, airports and other important business'/ buildings have been cited as potential targets. In 2003, a tip came in about Las Vegas being a potential target of ' Al Qaeda'.

As a result, " the FBI demanded records from all hotels, airlines, rental car agencies, casinos and other businesses on every person who visited Las Vegas in the run-up to the" time of the potential threat (www. pbs. org/wgbh/pages/frontline/homefront/ view. html). The government gathered personal and financial information on over 250, 000 individuals without a warrant. This invasion of privacy was not only unnecessary it was unfruitful.

No terrorists were found. When visitors to Las Vegas found out the government has investigated them, most were horrified. Where were their legal rights? What happened to innocent until found guilty? " Stephen Sprouse and Kristin Douglas of Kansas City, Mo. , object to being caught in the FBI dragnet in Las Vegas just because they happened to get married

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there at the wrong moment. Says Douglas, ‘ I’m sure that the government does a lot of things that I don’t know about, and I’ve always been OK with that — until I found out that I was included’” (www. pbs.

org/wgbh. pages/frontline/ homefront. html). Many lawmakers oppose the Patriot Act and the Bush Administration for just such a reason as The Las Vegas situation.

Unlimited power equals abuse of power. The forefathers of this country instituted a balance of power to prevent the situation that is occurring today. The Bush administration has no legal ground to set aside the laws that have carried this country through decades. Laws and acts instituting cannot circumvent the Constitution.

Allowing the NSA, FBI or CIA to tap phones calls, read emails, search homes/ businesses or put individuals under surveillance without a warrant is a violation of the first, fourth and ninth amendments. Even government officials with experience since 9/11 are nagged by anxiety about the jeopardy that a war without end against unseen terrorists poses to our way of life, our personal freedoms. ‘ I always said, when I was in my position running counter terrorism operations for the FBI, ‘ How much security do you want, and how many rights do you want to give up? ‘ Larry Mefford, former assistant FBI director, tells Smith. ‘ I can give you more security, but I’ve got to take away some rights.

Personally, I want to live in a country where you have a common-sense, fair balance, because I’m worried about people that are untrained, unsupervised,

doing things with good intentions but, at the end of the day, harm our liberties'" (www. pbs. org/wgbh. pages/frontline/homefront. html).

The actions of the Bush administration are not only illegal but they are also immoral. The end does not justify the means. When looking at what the Bush administration has done, the word ' right' cannot be used. The administration has invaded the privacy of hundreds of thousands of citizens and broken countless laws. By overlooking and setting aside key laws of this country, they have opened the door for further tampering with constitutional laws. Can we truly continue to call ourselves ' the land of the free' when people cannot make a phone call or send an email without fear of the government reading it? If someone disagrees with the agenda of the administration, does that make them a terrorist? On their quest to win the ' war on terror', the administration has left a legacy of distrust of the government.

By expanding the scale of executive powers, this administration has opened up something that may not be easily contained.