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## **Government Has Run Amok Since 9/11**

**by Sheldon Richman**

Those who understand the exploitative nature of big government suspected that the U.S. response to the 9/11 attacks had little to do with the security of the American people and much to do with power and money. Still, the magnitude of the scam, as revealed by the *Washington Post* last week, is astonishing.

Naturally, the politicians justify the growth in intelligence operations on national security grounds. To make sure such attacks never happen again, they said, new powers, agencies, personnel, and facilities were imperative.

Now the truth is out: the post-9/11 activity has been an obscene feeding frenzy at the public trough. Any resemblance to efforts at keeping Americans safe is strictly coincidental.

“The top-secret world the government created in response to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, has become so large, so unwieldy and so secretive that no one knows how much money it costs, how many people it employs, how many programs exist within it or exactly how many agencies do the same work” the *Post*’s Dana Priest and William Arkin write. “After nine years of unprecedented spending and growth, the result is that the system put in place to keep the United States safe is so massive that its effectiveness is impossible to determine.”

It would be a mistake to chalk up the government’s conduct to bureaucratic bumbling. This is not bumbling. It is highway robbery. Everyone who was well connected, either in government or the “private” sector, wanted a piece of the action, and chances are that he — and many others — got it. It doesn’t matter that multiple agencies do the same work and keep their findings secret from one another. It doesn’t matter that the volume of paperwork is beyond anyone’s capacity to absorb it. What matters is money, power, and prestige. This is the mother of all boondoggles.

Chew on some of the numbers from the *Post* investigation and see if it sounds as though protection of American society was a national-intelligence priority:

\* “Some 1,271 government organizations and 1,931 private companies work on programs related to counterterrorism, homeland security and intelligence in about 10,000 locations across the United States.”

\* “An estimated 854,000 people, nearly 1.5 times as many people as live in Washington, D.C., hold top-secret security clearances.”

\* “In Washington and the surrounding area, 33 building complexes for top-secret intelligence work are under construction or have been built since September 2001. Together they occupy the equivalent of almost three Pentagons or 22 U.S. Capitol buildings — about 17 million square feet of space.”

Moreover, the *Post* writes, “51 federal organizations and military commands, operating in 15 U.S. cities, track the flow of money to and from terrorist networks,” and “Analysts who make sense of documents and conversations obtained by foreign and domestic spying share their judgment by publishing 50,000 intelligence reports each year — a volume so large that *many are routinely ignored*” (emphasis added).

Since 9/11 no fewer than 263 intelligence and counterterrorism organizations have been “created or reorganized.”

And what about cost?

“The U.S. intelligence budget is vast, publicly announced last year as \$75 billion, 2 1/2 times the size it was on Sept. 10, 2001. But the figure doesn’t include many military activities or domestic counterterrorism programs.” In other words, no one knows how much the whole thieving operation costs.

According to Priest and Arkin, “[Many] officials who work in the intelligence agencies say they remain unclear about what the [Office of the Director of National Intelligence] is in charge of.”

It comes as no surprise that the mega-bureaucracy isn’t even much help fighting wars: “When Maj. Gen. John M. Custer was the director of intelligence at U.S. Central Command, he grew angry at how little helpful information came out of the [National Counterterrorism Center]. In 2007, he visited its director at the time, retired Vice Adm. John Scott Redd, to tell him so. ‘I told him that after 4 1/2 years, this organization had *never produced one shred of information that helped me prosecute three wars!*’ he said loudly, leaning over the table during an interview” (emphasis added).

These revelations should have any professed opponent of big government screaming bloody murder. So far the silence from conservatives has been deafening.

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**This article was originally published in July 2010.**