



State of War: The Secret History of the C.I.A. and the Bush Administration

By James Risen

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With relentless media coverage, breathtaking events, and extraordinary congressional and independent investigations, it is hard to believe that we still might not know some of the most significant facts about the presidency of George W. Bush. Yet beneath the surface events of the Bush presidency lies a secret history -- a series of hidden events that makes a mockery of current debate.

This hidden history involves domestic spying, abuses of power, and outrageous operations. It includes a CIA that became caught in a political cross fire that it could not withstand, and what it did to respond. It includes a Defense Department that made its own foreign policy, even against the wishes of the commander in chief. It features a president who created a sphere of deniability in which his top aides were briefed on matters of the utmost sensitivity -- but the president was carefully kept in ignorance. *State of War* reveals this hidden history for the first time, including scandals that will redefine the Bush presidency.

James Risen has covered national security for *The New York Times* for years. Based on extraordinary sources from top to bottom in Washington and around the world, drawn from dozens of interviews with key figures in the national security community, this book exposes an explosive chain of events:

- Contrary to law, and with little oversight, the National Security Administration has been engaged in a massive domestic spying program.
- On such sensitive issues as the use of torture, the administration created a zone of deniability: the president's top advisors were briefed, but the president himself was not.
- The United States actually gave nuclear-bomb designs to Iran.
- The CIA had overwhelming evidence that Iraq had no nuclear weapons programs during the run-up to the Iraq war. They kept that information to themselves and didn't tell the president.
- While the United States has refused to lift a finger, Afghanistan has become a narco-state, supplying 87 percent of the heroin sold on the global market.

These are just a few of the stories told in *State of War*. Beyond these shocking

specifics, Risen describes troubling patterns: Truth-seekers within the CIA were fired or ignored. Long-standing rules were trampled. Assassination squads were trained; war crimes were proposed. Yet for all the aggressiveness of America's spies, a blind eye was turned toward crucial links between al Qaeda and Saudi Arabia, among other sensitive topics.

Not since the revelations of CIA and FBI abuses in the 1970s have so many scandals in the intelligence community come to light. More broadly, Risen's secret history shows how power really works in George W. Bush's presidency.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

The winter holidays are usually a quiet time for news, but the December 2005 revelations of the Bush administration's extensive, off-the-books domestic spying program by *New York Times* reporters James Risen and Eric Lichtblau made headline after headline, raising criticism from both sides of the aisle and an immediate, unapologetic response from President Bush himself. On the heels of those scoops comes Risen's *State of War*, which goes beyond his *Times* stories to provide a wide-ranging, if anecdotal, "secret history" of U.S. intelligence following 9/11.

Risen's description of what he says was called "the Program"--the ongoing eavesdropping operation, done with almost no judicial or congressional oversight, on the phone calls and emails of hundreds of Americans (and potentially millions more)--is only a chapter in his larger tale of the recent missteps and oversteps of U.S. intelligence. His evidence ranges from insider White House accounts of Donald Rumsfeld, "the ultimate turf warrior," outmaneuvering his rivals to make the Defense Department the dominant voice in foreign policy, to on-the-ground reports of the administration's willful ignorance of crucial intelligence on the dormancy of Saddam's weapons programs, Saudi support for al Qaeda, and the startlingly rapid transformation of Afghanistan into a "narco-state" under American authority. Some of the episodes he recounts--Saudi security officials with Osama bin Laden screensavers, an Iraqi scientist who had told the CIA his country had no nuclear program watching Colin Powell testify to the UN that they did--would be comical were the stakes less high.

Risen's loyalties are not with the opposition party--he's sharply critical of Clinton's disinterest in the CIA--but with the career field agents who are his best sources. Those agents and their expertise, he argues, have been cast aside, along with the long centrist tradition of U.S. foreign policy and the basic checks and balances of the American system of government, by the Bush administration's radical politicization and militarization of intelligence. He covers a lot of ground in a book of just over 200 pages, some of it familiar from other accounts, and at times his tradecraft anecdotes can be hard to assess without context. But his specific revelations and his well-sourced, angry overview of the way the battles against terror have been fought make for startling, newsmaking reading. --*Tom Nissley*

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. Lucid, balanced and brimming with surprises, this is a-to borrow a notorious phrase-slam dunk exposé of the CIA's recent snafus. New York Times reporter Risen is broadly sympathetic to the CIA, and his tactful use of inside sources shifts much of the blame away from field agents and toward the brass in Washington, where CIA Director George Tenet's eagerness to please his political masters and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's bureaucratic skills create the conditions for a perfect storm of intelligence failures. The book's disclosures about secret prisons, "renditions"-the transfer of suspects to countries which may torture them-and domestic wiretaps are likely to be talking points for some time, but its lasting value will be as a record of how the CIA came so tantalizingly close to the truth about Iraq's nonexistent nuclear arsenal. The retelling of one undercover operation shows the agency had direct evidence that there was no nuclear program in Iraq, but chose to doubt its source. Other scenes from the secret war on terror make novelist John Le Carre look like a timid plotter: a single misdirected message in 2004 brings down the agency's entire spy network in Iran, four years after a harebrained scheme had given Tehran flawed blueprints for a nuclear weapon-hoping to sow confusion, but possibly helping Iran to arm itself faster. Risen has written a thrilling, depressing and worrying book.

From [The New Yorker](#)

Last month, the author, a Times reporter, broke, with his colleague Eric Lichtblau, the story of President Bush's authorization of warrantless domestic wiretapping by the N.S.A., in apparent defiance of Congress and the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. This account doesn't go much beyond what has been in the Times—indeed, follow-ups have overtaken it—but Risen offers a useful perspective on what the C.I.A. has been doing since September 11th, and some devastating summary judgments. In the Bush years, Risen writes, "no other institution failed in its mission as completely." George Tenet, the director, pandered to Bush and to Donald Rumsfeld; the agency passed on weapons intelligence that many knew was bad; the abuse of prisoners became accepted. But the main leadership failure Risen sees is that of the President, who, he writes, got from the C.I.A. no more than what he asked for.

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Users Review

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Katherine Sherrer:

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