



State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration

By James Risen

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James Risen has broken story after story on the abuses of power of the Bush administration.

From warrantless wiretapping to secret financial data mining to the CIA's rogue operations, he has shown again and again that the executive branch has dangerously overreached, repudiated checks and balances on its power, and maintained secrecy even with its allies in Congress. In no small part thanks to Risen and *State of War*, the "secret history" of the Bush years has now come partially into view.

In a new epilogue for the paperback edition, Risen describes the two-front war that President Bush is now fighting: at home against Congress and the Supreme Court, as his administration is increasingly reined in from its abuses; and in the Middle East, where George W. Bush's great gamble to bring a democratic revolution is failing radically. We must learn the lessons of Risen's history now, before it is too late.

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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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