

Exposing Bush's historic abuse of power

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Wednesday, Jul 23, 2008 12:00 PM UTC

The last several years have brought a parade of dark revelations about the George W. Bush administration, from the manipulation of intelligence to torture to extrajudicial spying inside the United States. But there are growing indications that these known abuses of power may only be the tip of the iceberg. Now, in the twilight of the Bush presidency, a movement is stirring in Washington for a sweeping new inquiry into White House malfeasance that would be modeled after the famous Church Committee congressional investigation of the 1970s.

While reporting on [domestic surveillance under Bush](#), Salon obtained a detailed memo proposing such an inquiry, and spoke with several sources involved in recent discussions around it on Capitol Hill. The memo was written by a former senior member of the original Church Committee; the discussions have included aides to top House Democrats, including Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Judiciary Committee chairman John Conyers, and until now have not been disclosed publicly.

Salon has also uncovered further indications of far-reaching and possibly illegal surveillance conducted by the National Security Agency inside the United States under President Bush. That includes the alleged use of a top-secret, sophisticated database system for monitoring people considered to be a threat to national security. It also includes signs of the NSA's working closely with other U.S. government agencies to track financial transactions domestically as well as globally.

The proposal for a Church Committee-style investigation emerged from talks between civil liberties advocates and aides to Democratic leaders in Congress, according to sources involved. (Pelosi's and Conyers' offices both declined to comment.) Looking forward to 2009, when both Congress and the White House may well be controlled by Democrats, the idea is to have Congress appoint an investigative body to discover the full extent of what the Bush White House did in the war on terror to undermine the Constitution and U.S. and international laws. The goal would be to implement government reforms aimed at preventing future abuses — and perhaps to bring accountability for wrongdoing by Bush officials.

“If we know this much about torture, rendition, secret prisons and warrantless wiretapping despite the administration's attempts to stonewall, then imagine what we don't know,” says a senior Democratic congressional aide who is familiar with the proposal and has been involved in several high-profile congressional investigations.



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