

**MADE IN THE SHADE;
THE PRESIDENT IS RIGHT TO
CREATE A PARALLEL
GOVERNMENT IN SECRET.
IS CONGRESS PREPARED FOR THE
WORST?**

By William Safire
The New York Times
March 14, 2002

Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men?" asked the brooding voice of "Lamont Cranston" on a radio series that transfixed Americans about three generations ago. Goosebumpy listeners joined in the answer: "The Shadow knows."

"Shadow Government Is at Work in Secret" was the headline over a recent story by Barton Gellman and Susan Schmidt of *The Washington Post*. That caused some consternation because the word shadow suggests sinister, dark doings -- although in Britain, the phrase "shadow Cabinet" has been in use since 1903 to describe the government's loyal-opposition counterparts.

But the news of an operation called "continuity in government" (or COG, as it was immediately acronymmed) was happily received by those of us who have been espousing quick action to enable the government to function in the event of catastrophe in the nation's capital.

A hundred or so unexpendable bureaucrats are rotated in and out of bunkers in hidden locations that even journalists feel no need to reveal. That way, if disaster strikes, federal officials in their bunkers (not an "underground government") can properly assume command, responding to attacks, averting cyberterrorist disruptions in the nation's telecommunications and mobilizing the far-flung federal establishment.

"We take the continuity-of-government issue seriously," said President Bush, not at all defensive when the story broke. Such planning has been done since the Eisenhower era; now that we've seen a real threat, we're doing the fire drills realistically.

Grumbling in Congress has been limited to "Why weren't we told?" The leadership had a right to expect to be informed, but that raises a counter-grumble: What is Congress doing to prepare to avert national paralysis in the remote event the Capitol is suddenly destroyed?

One good idea was put forth here last October: Since state governors can replace missing senators by appointment, why not amend the Constitution to enable governors to appoint replacements of casualties in the House as well who would serve until a special election could be held? It takes time to amend the Constitution, and the time to get started is while we still remember our wake-up call.

The Senate should update the Presidential Succession Act by naming its majority leader as president pro tem. The hoary tradition is for the senior member of the Senate to hold that post, but now that the post is third in line to the presidency, good sense requires a change lest we awaken to discover that Strom Thurmond, 99, or Robert Byrd, 84, has become our commander in chief.

Tom Daschle, the present majority leader, disagrees. "If the pope can lead the Catholic Church in his 80s," he tells me, "surely someone of Sen. Byrd's capacity could do the same for our country." He thinks that updating the succession would be "heavy lifting" and "not necessary."

If Daschle is too shy to put himself into the line of succession, let the Senate delay the change's effect until the next majority

leader. (Soon enough, Daschle will be out on his ear as the Senate majority switches -- or will be president himself, his timidity on this issue notwithstanding.)

The Supreme Court hints it has plans for emergency succession, but won't say; Pat Leahy at the Senate Judiciary Committee should stop rubber-stamping Bush nominees for judgeships long enough to demand to know the Supremes' plans. The suggestion was aired here of "a shadow Supreme Court, made up of the chief judges of the federal appeals courts," which would have "the advantage of geographical dispersion."

Meanwhile, catastrophe contingency is being explored outside government, too. Under the auspices of the Business Roundtable, AT&T is designing a "CEO Link" to provide secure, wireless communications among scores of movers and shakers in times of peril to keep factories running. (But by foolishly seeking tax credits for such anti-terrorism investment, the chief executives dreaming of unprecedented interface may awaken even the somnolent antitrusters at Ashcroft Justice.)

All this public and private preparation for a reaction to potential disaster makes sense. Though some must be secret, it need not be cause for fear of untrammelled power -- provided it has the oversight of watchdog committees and nosy media. Who knows what dangers lurk in countering the axis of evil? The Shadow knows.

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