



Immigrant Crackdowns Are Building the National Security State

By Roberto Lovato, Public Eye

Posted on April 14, 2008, Printed on April 16, 2008

<http://www.alternet.org/story/81008/>

"He [King George] has erected a multitude of new offices and set hither swarms of officers to harass out people and eat out their subsistence." The Declaration of Independence, 1776

Building Up the Domestic Security Apparatus

Most explanations of the relentless pursuit of undocumented immigrants since 9/11 view it as a response to the continuing pressures of angry, mostly white, citizens. The "anti-immigrant climate" created by civic groups like the Minutemen, politicians like (name the Republican candidate of your choice) and media personalities like CNN's Lou Dobbs, we are told, has led directly to the massive -- and growing -- government bureaucracy for policing immigrants.

The Washington Post, for example, told us in 2006 that "The Minutemen rose to prominence last year when they began organizing armed citizen patrols along the U.S.-Mexico border, a move credited with helping to ignite the debate that has dominated Washington in recent months." Along the way to allegedly responding to "grassroots" calls about "real immigration reform" and "doing something about illegals," the Bush Administration dismantled the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and created the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, whose more than 15,000 employees and \$5.6 billion budget make it the largest investigative component of the Department of Homeland Security and the second largest investigative agency in the federal government after the FBI. In the process of restructuring, national security concerns regarding threats from external terrorist enemies got mixed in with domestic concerns about immigrant "invaders" denounced by a growing galaxy of anti-immigrant interests.

Implicit in daily media reports about "immigration reform" is the idea that bottom-up pressure led to the decision to dismantle the former INS and then place the immigration bureaucracy under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Citizen activism contributed significantly to the most massive, most important government restructuring since the end of World War II. Nor do press accounts mention Boeing and other aerospace and surveillance companies, which, for example, will benefit as government contractors to the federal Secure Border Initiative (SBI) that is scheduled to receive more than \$2 billion in funding for fencing, electronic surveillance and other equipment required for the new physical and virtual fence being built at the border.

Nowhere in the more popular explanations of this historic and massive government

restructuring of immigration and other government functions do the *raisons d'etat* -- the reasons of the state, the logic of government -- enter the picture. When talking about immigration reform, what little, if any, agency ascribed to the Bush Administration usually includes such mantra-like phrases like "protecting the homeland," "securing the border," and others. And even in the immigrant rights community few, for example, are asking why the Bush Administration decided to move the citizenship processing and immigration enforcement functions of government from the more domestic, policing-oriented Department of Justice (DOJ) to the more militarized, anti-terrorist bureaucracy of the Department of Homeland Security.

Little, if any, consideration is given to the possibility that immigrants and immigration policy serve other interests that have nothing to do with chasing down maids, poultry workers, and landscapers.

Failure to consider the reasons of state behind the buildup leading to the birth of the ICE, the most militarized branch of the federal government after the Pentagon, leaves the analysis of, and political action around, immigration reform partial at best. While important, focusing on the electoral workings of the white voter excludes a fundamental part of the immigration bureaucracy equation: how immigrants provide the rationale for the expansion of government policing bureaucracy in times of political crisis, economic distress, and major geopolitical shifts. Shortly after the attacks and the creation of DHS, the Bush Administration used immigrants and fear of outsiders to tighten border restrictions, pass repressive laws and increase budgets to put more drones, weapons and troops inside the country.

Government actions since 9/11 point clearly to how the U.S. government has set up a new Pentagon-like bureaucracy to fight a new kind of protracted domestic war against a new kind of domestic enemy -- undocumented immigrants. While willing to believe that there were ulterior motives behind the Iraq war and the pursuit of al Qaeda, few consider that there are non-immigration-related motives behind ICE's al Qaeda-ization of immigrants and immigration policy: multi-billion dollar contracts to military-industrial companies like Boeing, General Electric and Halliburton for "virtual" border walls, migrant detention centers, drones, ground-based sensors, and other surveillance technology for use in the Arizona desert that were originally designed for war zones like the deserts of Iraq; the de-facto militarization of immigration policy through the deployment of 6,000 additional National Guard troops to the U.S.-Mexico border; hundreds of raids in neighborhoods and workplaces across the country; the passage of hundreds of punitive, anti-migrant state and federal laws like the Military Commissions Act, which denies the habeas corpus rights of even legal residents who are suspected of providing "material support" to terrorist groups.

In the same way that private companies like the Pinkerton Detective Agency provided highly profitable policing, surveillance, and other government services targeting immigrants and citizens in the 20th century, companies like Halliburton, Blackwater, the Corrections Corporation of America, Boeing, and others are reaping profits by helping build the government's immigrant policing bureaucracy today.

Contrary to the electoral logic prevailing in "pro-immigrant" and mainstream media explanations of the current buildup of the (anti)immigrant government bureaucracy, ICE's war on immigrants is not solely, nor even primarily about shoring up support for the Republicans and other prowar political and economic interests as most analysts and activists would have us believe. A look at precedents for this kind of government anti-immigrant action yields the conclusion that using immigrants to build up government policing and military capabilities is, in fact, a standard practice of the art of statecraft. The historical record provides ample evidence of how national security experts, politicians, elected officials, bureaucrats and other managers of the state have used immigrants and anti-immigrant sentiments and policies as a way of normalizing and advancing militarization within the borders of the United States (the "homeland").

At a time when the mortgage and banking crises make obvious that the American Dream is dying for most, a time in which even its illusion is hardly tenable as revealed in polls that found that less than 18 percent of the U.S. population believes it is living the "American Dream," the state needs many reasons to reassert control over an increasingly unruly populace by putting more ICE agents and other gun-wielding government agents among the citizenry.

Focusing on non-citizens makes it easier for citizens to swallow the increased domestic militarism inherent in increasing numbers of uniformed men and women with guns in their midst. Constant reports of raids on the homes of the undocumented immigrants normalize the idea of government intrusion into the homes of legal residents. Political scientists, investigative journalists, and activists have long reminded us of how elites are constantly concerned with creating the structures that may be needed to control a potentially unruly population, especially one protesting for its rights like the millions of immigrants who marched in 2006.

History and present experience remind us that, in times of heightened (and often exaggerated) fears about national security, immigration and immigrants are no longer just wedge issues in electoral politics; they magically morph into "dangerous" others who fill the need for new, domestic enemies required by an economy, a political system, a citizenry, a country created, nurtured and dependent on civilizational warfare and expansionism. Historians write about the geopolitical contours of the U.S. empire that began with the stealing of Mexican land. But little to no attention is paid to how, today, the domestic contours of empire -- and the infrastructure that supports it -- are also being reinforced by targeting Mexicans and other immigrants actually living inside this now very troubled land.

The ICE's media and policy framing of the issue of immigration as a kind of "war" complete with "most wanted" lists of terrorists, drug traffickers, and immigrants like Elvira Arellano, the undocumented immigrant leader deported after seeking and gaining sanctuary in a Chicago church, follows clearly the directives outlined in a couple of critical documents developed just after 9/11.

A Key Moment After 9/11

In order to understand how and why ICE now constitutes an important part of the ascendant national security bureaucracy, we must first look at the intimate

relationship between National Security policy and "Homeland Security" policy. One of the defining aspects of immigration policy and the current attacks on immigrants is the fact that they are being shaped by elite priorities of the post-9/11 climate.

Shortly after 9/11, the Bush Administration had, in July 2002, introduced its "National Strategy for Homeland Security," a document that outlines how to "mobilize and organize our Nation to secure the U.S. homeland from terrorist attacks." Two months later, the Bush Administration released the more geopolitically focused "National Security Strategy of the United States of America," whose purpose is to "help make the world not just safer but better." 9/11 provided the impetus to create a bureaucratic and policy environment dominated by security imperatives laid out in two of the most definitive documents of our time, documents which outline strategies that, we are told, "together take precedence over all other national strategies, programs, and plans," including immigration policy. Immigration policy nonetheless receives considerable attention, especially in the Homeland Security Strategy. The role of the private sector is also made explicit on the DHS website, which says, "The Department of Homeland Security is responsible for assessing the nation's vulnerabilities" and that "the private sector is central to this task."

By placing other government functions under the purview of the national security imperatives laid out in the two documents, the Bush Administration enabled and deepened the militarization of government bureaucracies like the ICE. At the same time, immigrants provided the Bush Administration a way to facilitate the transference of public wealth to military industrial interests like those of Halliburton, Boeing and others through government contracts in a kind of Homeland Security Keynesianism.

For example the two documents called for DHS to "Establish a national laboratory for homeland security" that solicits "independent and private analysis for science." This materialized through the budget of ICE, which has resources for research and development of technologies for surveilling, capturing, detaining, and generally combating what politicians and Minutemen alike paint as the Malthusian monster of immigration. Again, immigrants help the state justify massive expenditures like those for the creation and maintenance of ICE, which, in turn, have led to a major reconfiguration and expansion of the state itself.

Perennial complaints of the former INS's infamous inefficiency in both its border enforcement and citizenship processing functions, and the 9/11 catastrophe, combined to create the perfect political storm that swept in another historic bureaucratic shift. Hidden behind what some call the "anti-immigrant hysteria" characterizing periods like ours are the political crises, economic earthquakes and geopolitical crises that drive history.

The Lessons of History

History provides several precedents that illustrate how immigrants have consistently provided elite political and corporate interests the rationale for major government restructuring that often has little to do with migration and much to do with other things, like: bureaucratic patronage (think big government contracts for military

industrial firms); deploying and displaying power; controlling the populace and rallying different sectors of society round the idea of the nation (nationalism).

Long before the Patriot Act, DHS and ICE, policies linking immigrants to the security of the country have formed an important part of U.S. statecraft. The period before and after the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, which gave then-president John Adams the authority to remove any immigrant he deemed a threat to national security, is one example. During this time, the Bush-like enumeration of "Seditious Acts" was linked to the elite need to control the populace, and militarize the society in times of profound instability. Another example is the period of the Red Scare of 1919, when millions of mostly-immigrant-led strikers provided the political impetus leading to the creation of the domestic policing bureaucracy known as the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). History has shown that, in times of extraordinary instability, governments go to extraordinary lengths and spend extraordinary amounts of money to create and reinforce the ramparts of their policing apparatus and of nationhood itself. Current efforts by the U.S. government to instrumentalize immigrants as a means of buttressing itself in times of domestic and geopolitical crisis follows a logic tried and true since the establishment of the country amidst the global and internal turbulence around the turn of the 18th century.

Immigrants and the Establishment of the National Security State

Like many of the newly established countries suffering some of the political and economic shocks of economic and political modernization in the late eighteenth century, the fledgling United States and its leaders needed to simultaneously consolidate the nation state established constitutionally in 1787 while also maneuvering for a position on a global map dominated by the warring powers of France and England. Central to accomplishing this were immigrants who provided both a means of rallying and aligning segments of the populace while also legitimating massive expenditures towards the construction of the militarized bureaucracies meant to defend against domestic threats to "national" security which linked external enemies real and perceived.

At the turn of the 18th century, the United States was much weaker than and still very vulnerable to the power of Britain and France, which were engaged in a war that defined political positions inside and outside the new country. Like many of their elite and more imperially inclined Federalist peers, Alexander Hamilton and President John Adams were fearful of the French revolution. Developments in the revolutionary republic pushed people and states around the Atlantic world to take positions for and against the revolution at that time. In addition, some Federalists like Hamilton also wanted to push out the French and conquer Florida, Louisiana, and South America.

Immigrants and immigration policy of the post-revolutionary period became ensnared in the battle for power between Federalists, who advocated a more urban and mercantile route to nationhood, and the anti-Federalist Republicans led by Thomas Jefferson, whose romantic proto-capitalist path to consolidation of the nation was paved by agrarian expansion. The battles between the Federalists and anti-Federalists played themselves out in relation to France and the ideals of the

French revolution, as elites tried to cope with the instability wrought by capitalist expansion on the rural majority.

The political, economic and geopolitical crises inherent in the modernization process had a profound impact on how elites and the state viewed the large immigrant population in the United States. In response to the devastating effects of economic transformation, thousands of French, German, Irish and other immigrants led uprisings like the Whiskey Rebellion and Shay's Rebellion, which were viewed as threats by elites, especially the Federalists.

In the face of both popular unrest and Republican competition for political power, and in their efforts to consolidate the state and the globally oriented mercantile and pre-industrial capitalist economy, Hamilton and then-President Adams did what has, since their time, become a standard operating procedure in the art of U.S. statecraft: build the state and insert its control apparatus in the larger populace by scapegoating immigrants as threats to national security.

In the words of historian John Morton Smith, "The internal security program adopted by the Federalists during the Administration of John Adams was designed not only to deal with potential dangers from foreign invasion growing out of the "Half War" with France, but also to repress domestic political opposition." In this context, immigrants became the domestic expression of the threat represented by the French Jacobins, the proto-communist and al Qaeda-like subversive threat of the early nineteenth century. Commenting on this threat, Samuel Sitgreaves, a Federalist Congressman from Pennsylvania, made the connection between internal immigrant threats and external big power threats when he said in May 1798 " ... the business of defence would be very imperfectly done, if Congress confined their operations of defence to land and naval forces, and neglected to destroy the cankerworm which is corroding the heart of the country ... there are a great number of aliens in this country from that nation [France] with whom we have at present alarming differences ... there are emissaries amongst us, who have not only fomented our differences with that country, but who have also endeavored to create divisions amongst our own citizens."

Also considered a threat were the free and unfree blacks who elites feared might form a "domestic army of ten thousand blacks." Other fears of subversion by domestic interests linked to external enemies were stoked by rampant rumors of a French-influenced "Illuminati" conspiracy, an "internal invasion" to create a godless, global "new world order" allegedly led by emigrants from France and St. Domingue. The modern use of the word "terror" first enters the language when Sir Edmund Burke gazed across the English Channel and applied it to the actions of the Jacobin state in France.

Burke's conservative American cousins then adopted the term and applied it to French-influenced immigrants and others considered subversive. Such a climate aided Federalists in their efforts to centralize and consolidate both power and nationhood. Hamilton and then-President John Adams undertook several legal and other institutional initiatives designed to enhance their and the state's power while also putting their Republican critics and other opposition in check. Laws facilitating press censorship were coupled with calls to unify the nation in preparation for war

with France. After Hamilton and the Federalists raised taxes to pay for their expansionist expenditures to consolidate their version of the new country, a group of people who refused to pay taxes unleashed Fries' Rebellion. In response, Adams, Hamilton and the Federalists seized on the unrest to unleash heretofore unrealized state powers and nation-reinforcing state bureaucracy.

At the core of the moves was the infamous Alien and Sedition Acts proposed by Adams and passed in 1798. The law targeted the immigrant threat by making it easier to put them in jail for subverting the government.

At the same time that they passed the Alien and Sedition Acts, Adams, Hamilton and the Federalists also implemented the first major reorganization of government bureaucracy. Central to this reorganization was the establishment of the Department of the Navy, a revived U.S. Marine Corps and a "New Army" in the 1798. In the same session in which it passed the Alien and Sedition acts, the Federalist-dominated fifth congress passed in its first session a bill authorizing \$454,000 on defense, which, at that time represented a large expenditure. During its second session it authorized \$3,887,971.81, an amount equal to "more than the entire 1st congress had appropriated for all government expenditures". During its third session it authorized \$6 million for a total of over \$10 million. The end result of the anti-immigrant expenditures Federalists created what some call the first national security state.

Immigrants, the Red Scare, and the Birth of the FBI Bureaucracy

A similar situation in which a crisis sparking immigrant activism led to a major build-up of the government policing apparatus took place during the Red Scare of 1919. The U.S. government faced several economic and political pressures including the end of World War I, the demobilization of the Army, returning troops, joblessness, depression, unemployment and growing inflation.

The precarious situation gave rise to increased elite fear of Jewish, Italian and other immigrant workers in the era of the Bolshevik revolution and an increasingly powerful -- and militant -- labor movement. Socialists, Wobblies, and other activists like Emma Goldman, who were against the war and demonstrated high levels of labor militancy, staged historic labor actions in 1919. That year saw 3,600 labor strikes involving four million workers, many of whom were led by and were immigrants. Government and big business had to watch as a full one-fifth of the manufacturing workforce staged actions. Massive organizing by Jamaican immigrant Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association and race riots in northern cities further stoked elite fears and gave birth to the institutional response to what became known as the Red Scare.

Like other national governments of the period, the United States had begun intensifying the centralization of functions formerly carried out by the private sector, including keeping labor and other dissidents in check. In the words of Reginald Schmidt, author of *The FBI and the Origins of Anti-Communism in the United States*, "In response to social problems caused by industrialization, urbanization and immigration and the potential political threats to the existing order posed by the Socialist Party, the IWW and, in 1919, the Communist parties, industrial and

political leaders began to look to the federal government, with its growing and powerful bureaucratic organizations to monitor and control political opposition." Major expansion of the state via the building of new bureaucracies (Bureau of Corporations, Department of Labor, Federal Trade Commission, etc.) and bureaucratic infighting for government resources and legal jurisdiction between the Bureau of Investigation, the precursor of the FBI, the Department of Labor and other agencies turned the largely immigrant-led unrest into an unprecedented opportunity for A. Mitchell Palmer and his lieutenant, J. Edgar Hoover. Both men saw in the domestic crisis an opportunity to build and expand personal fortunes and what would eventually become the Federal Bureau of Investigation. FBI historian John A. Noakes concluded that "The domestic unrest during this period presented the Bureau of Investigation the opportunity to expand its domain and increase its power."

Illustrating the budgetary effects of the Bureau's power grab, he continues, "Following the armistice, but before the Bureau's decision to join the Red Scare hysteria, the Bureau had requested an appropriation of \$1,500,000. When the Department of Justice declared the nation in imminent danger of a radical uprising, however, Congress immediately increased the appropriation by \$500,000; by the end of the fiscal year the Bureau had a budget of \$2,750,000."

Thousands of immigrants were surveilled, rounded up, and deported during the Red Scare. Just five years after the Scare, Hoover went on to found the FBI and became the most powerful non-elected official in U.S. history. In what sounds like a precursor to the current ICE raids, local police and federal agents collaborated around immigration. FBI historian Kenneth D. Ackerman states, "Backed by local police and volunteer vigilantes, federal agents hit in dozens of cities and arrested more than 10,000 suspected communists and fellow travelers. They burst into homes, classrooms and meeting halls, seizing everyone in sight, breaking doors and heads with abandon. The agents ignored legal niceties such as search warrants or arrest warrants. They questioned suspects in secret, imposed prohibitive bail and kept them locked up for months in foul, overcrowded, makeshift prisons." Close to none of these immigrant prisoners had anything to do with radical violence. And, according to Ackerman, "Palmer's grand crackdown was one big exercise in guilt by association, based primarily on bogus fears of immigrants being connected to vilified radical groups such as the recently formed American Communist Party." Drawing parallels between the Red Scare and the current "War on Terror," Ackerman concludes, "Almost 90 years later, today's war on terror exists in an echo chamber of the 1919 Red scare."

Conclusion

As shown in the examples from U.S. history, immigrants provide the state with ample excuse to expand, especially in times of geopolitical and domestic crisis. During the post-revolutionary period, the pursuit of alleged immigrant subversives led to the massive funding of the Department of the Navy and to the expansion of state power through laws like the Alien and Seditions Acts. Similarly, the crisis following the end of World War I led to the creation of the FBI and to unprecedented government repression and expansion embodied by the Palmer Raids. "In eliminating the Wobblies, government officials passed legislation, evolved techniques, and learned lessons that shaped later course of conduct." Viewed from a

historical perspective, it is no surprise that the government should respond to the geopolitical and domestic crisis in the United States with expanded government power and bureaucracy. Rather than view the placement of ICE under DHS as solely about controlling immigrant labor or about political (and electoral) opportunism disguised as government policy (both are, in fact, part of the equation), it is important to connect the creation of ICE and its placement under DHS to the perpetual drive of government to expand its powers, especially its repressive apparatus and other mechanisms of social control.

From this perspective, the current framing of the issue of immigration as a "national security" concern -- one requiring the bureaucratic shift towards "Homeland Security" -- fits well within historical practices that extend government power to control not just immigrants, but those born here, most of whom don't see immigration policy affecting them.

One of the things that makes the current politico-bureaucratic moment different, however, is the fluidity and increasing precariousness of the state itself. Like other nation states, the United States suffers from strains wrought by the free hand of global corporations that have abandoned large segments of its workforce. Such a situation necessitates the institutionalization of the war on immigrants in order to get as many armed government agents into a society that may be teetering on even more serious collapse as seen in the recession and economic crisis devastating core components of the American Dream such as education, health care and home ownership. Unlike the previous periods, the creation of massive bureaucracies superseded the need to surveil, arrest and deport migrants. Today, there appears to be a move to make permanent the capacity of the state to pursue, jail and deport migrants in order to sustain what some call a kind of migration-military-industrial complex.

Several indicators make clear that we are well on our way to making the war on immigrants a permanent feature of a government in crisis. In addition to being the largest, most-militarized component of DHS, ICE, spends more than one fifth of the multibillion dollar DHS budget and is also its largest investigative arm. As mentioned previously, multibillion dollar contracts for border security from DHS have become an important new market to aerospace companies like General Electric, Lockheed and Boeing, which secured a \$2.5 billion contract for the Secure Borders Initiative, a DHS program to build surveillance and other technological capabilities. That some saw in 9/11 an opportunity to expand and grow government technological capabilities -- and private sector patronage -- through such contracts, can be seen in the fact that DHS was created with what the national security documents say is a priority to "Establish a national laboratory for homeland security" that would "solicit independent and private analysis for science and technology research."

Like its predecessor, the "military-industrial complex", the migrant-military industrial complex tries to integrate federal and state economic interests through a kind of Homeland Security Keynesianism in which increasing numbers of companies are bidding for, and dependent on, big contracts like the Boeing contract or the \$385 million DHS contract for the construction of immigrant prisons. Also like its military-industrial cousin, the migrant military industrial complex has its

own web of relationships between corporations, government contracts and elected officials. Nowhere is this connection clearer than in the case of James Sensenbrenner, the anti-immigrant godfather who sponsored HR 4437 which criminalized immigrants and those who would help them. According to his 2005 financial disclosure statement, Sensenbrenner held \$86,500 in Halliburton stocks, \$563,536 in General Electric and Boeing is among the top contributors to the Congressman's PAC (Sensenbrenner also owns stocks in companies like Olive Garden restaurants, which hire undocumented workers.)

In conclusion, the current war on immigrants is grounded in the history of statecraft and big government bureaucracy. While critical, the almost exclusive focus of the immigrant rights movement on the laws and employment of workers fails to take into consideration the need for a war on immigrants to build and maintain massive policing bureaucracies like ICE and DHS. In their search for solutions to the continuing crisis of immigration policy, activists might consider focusing at least some energy on the reasons of the federal state rather than solely on state legislatures, white voters, elections and the immigrants.

Roberto Lovato, a frequent Nation contributor, is a New York-based writer with New America Media.

© 2008 Public Eye All rights reserved.

View this story online at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/81008/>