

CONVERGENCE

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'A coup: a spirit at odds with liberty'

INSIDE



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Despite end of cold war, Congress votes to increase Presidential covert ops power

Last year began with the promise of a "peace dividend" and ended with preparations for war on a scale unknown since Vietnam. At press time it was not clear if the Gulf crisis would be resolved by negotiations or escalate into a shooting war. One outcome was already certain, however: Despite the end of the Cold War, the President and his supporters in Congress believe the United States must act as a military superpower into the indefinite future.

The peace dividend was not the only casualty of the Gulf crisis: So was the constitutional responsibility of Congress to declare war. President Bush now claims the right to send United States troops into action on his own authority. He is also claiming expanded powers to conduct covert operations—a form of secret, undeclared war—without the consent of Congress.

This issue of *Convergence* centers on the human and moral costs of covert operations, both in the past and the future. We introduce the subject with a warning by Bill Moyers from "High Crimes and Misdemeanors," a recent *Frontline* special aired on the Public Broadcasting System.

"Basic constitutional issues still have not been confronted. Can a President, on his own, wage a war that Congress opposes? And how are we the people to hold our leaders accountable if we are kept in the dark about their deeds? What happened in Iran-*contra* was nothing less than the systematic disregard for democracy itself.

"It was, in effect, a *coup*—a spirit at odds with liberty. Officials who boasted of themselves as men of the Constitution showed utter contempt for the law. They had the money and power to do what they wanted, the guile to hide their tracks and the arrogance simply to declare what they did was legal.

"The frightening thing is not that it almost worked, but that it could happen again. The state of democracy almost guarantees it will. The men responsible for Iran-*contra*, except for a few, have been absolved, exonerated or reprieved and gone on to better things. The Government continues to hide its dirty linen behind top secret classifications.

"And just last month with little debate and scant attention from the media, the House and Senate agreed on a new intelligence bill giving the President wider power than ever to conduct covert operations using any agency he pleases.

"Next time the crimes of Iran-*contra* may not be crimes at all. Or even misdemeanors." □

For more on the intelligence bill, please turn to page 11 ■

