

# ***SEIZING POWER***

## **Project Proposal**



### ***A NEW DOCUMENTARY FEATURE FROM AN ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING TEAM***

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Organization: Empowerment Project  
Running Time: 110 minutes  
Total Budget: \$333,716  
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# ***SEIZING POWER***

## **CONTENTS**

Synopsis . . . . .	1
Project Components . . . . .	1
Documentary Style . . . . .	1
Treatment . . . . .	2
The Patriot Act . . . . .	2
Principles Betrayed . . . . .	3
The 9/11 Ruse . . . . .	3
Historical Context . . . . .	3
The Vietnam Syndrome . . . . .	4
The Torture Coverup . . . . .	4
Obama’s Kill List . . . . .	5
Perpetual Warfare . . . . .	6
The Gravy Train . . . . .	6
Targeting the Media . . . . .	7
Secrecy . . . . .	7
Whistleblowers . . . . .	8
Eliminating Privacy . . . . .	8
Phony Reform . . . . .	9
Death of the Fourth Amendment. . . . .	9
Accountability. . . . .	10
“Trust Us” . . . . .	10
The Challenge . . . . .	10
Project Status . . . . .	11
Producing Organization . . . . .	11
Key Personnel . . . . .	11
Outreach & Strategic Communication . . . . .	12
Audience Engagement . . . . .	12
Marketing . . . . .	13
Links to Video Samples . . . . .	14
Fundraising Sources & Strategy . . . . .	15

# ***SEIZING POWER***

## **SYNOPSIS**

*Seizing Power* reveals how America's preoccupation with terrorism, warfare and "homeland security" is transforming the nation into an authoritarian system that disregards individual rights in favor of the security and power of the state.

It shows how vested interests in the military-security establishment have dramatically expanded their influence and control of foreign and domestic policy, creating a permanent condition of warfare that consumes ever-expanding amounts of taxpayer money and enriches privileged private interests.

The project examines the unprecedented erosion of civil liberties and constitutional rights since 9/11, and questions whether citizens will take action to reclaim and protect them. It investigates illegal surveillance, detention, torture and assassination committed and authorized by government officials, and considers the case for war crimes prosecutions.

*Seizing Power* explores the little-known story of how the American security state has evolved, and warns us what lies ahead if the country continues on its present course.

## **PROJECT COMPONENTS**

The *Seizing Power* project consists of a feature-length documentary, an interactive website, a series of short stand-alone videos addressing individual topics in the film, and corresponding educational modules with resource materials for use in social action and education campaigns. An audience engagement and outreach component employs methods of reaching and motivating target audiences to further the project goals.

## **DOCUMENTARY STYLE**

The *Seizing Power* documentary follows a coherent chronology of events, and spells out a story of arrogance, secrecy and deception that will be surprising, if not shocking, to most viewers. The story is told in dramatic exposé style by key players, former government insiders, investigative journalists, whistleblowers and victims of government abuse. (See the complete list of [participants](#).)

Interviews are juxtaposed with clips of media coverage, congressional testimony and press conferences, along with spontaneous opinions from people on the street. Scenes from Congressional hearings show tense confrontations, deceptive testimony, and the hard line opinions and attitudes of government officials.

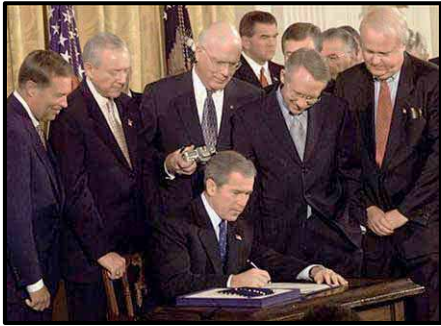
The narrator becomes a familiar voice that guides viewers through a sometimes-complicated story. Graphics and animation sequences add visual interest. A subtle musical underscore creates moods and emphasizes emotional moments and transitions.

## TREATMENT

*Story development is still in process.  
Following is a summarized narrative in its current version.*

**Teaser.** We open with a fast-paced sequence of emotional comments by individuals on both sides of the controversial issue of how the country has changed since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001—some advocating more aggressive government action, and others warning of an out-of-control military and security establishment that is creating more enemies, bleeding the nation’s financial resources, and destroying individual rights.

### MAIN TITLE: *Seizing Power*

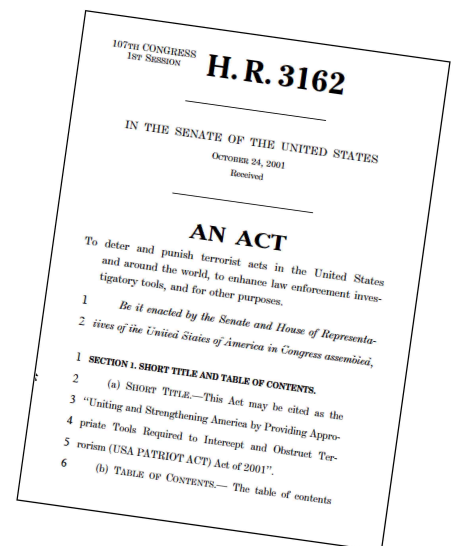


As scenes of the devastation in New York City during the 9/11 attacks fade out, we flash forward to Washington DC six weeks later as Congress is considering sweeping new powers contained in the USA Patriot Act. Attorney General John Ashcroft addresses the Senate Judiciary Committee, warning that additional terrorist acts are imminent and that Congress will be to blame if the bill is not passed immediately. We hear the final vote from the Senate floor, and then see President George W. Bush signing the Act into law, surrounded by members of Congress behind a banner that says “Protecting America.”

**The Patriot Act.** The Patriot Act gave unprecedented powers to the President and federal agencies, allowing agents to demand access to information and records without warrants or probable cause, to detain aliens indefinitely, and to secretly break into homes and offices to obtain information. A controversial section was later secretly interpreted to allow for warrantless mass surveillance of Americans’ phone records by the National Security Agency.

As investigative Journalist Robert Dreyfuss describes it, “They went to the shelf and they took down eight or nine different pieces of legislation and wrapped it up and they rammed that through Congress.”

It was the most radical legislation affecting the rights of citizens since the US Constitution was adopted in 1787, yet it was rushed through with almost no debate. The complicated bill was over 300 pages long, but it wasn’t even made available to members of Congress until shortly before the vote, and almost none of them actually read it before voting.



**An Early Warning.** As media clips reporting the passage of the Patriot Act slowly fade out, we flash back to the reenacted voice of James Madison, America’s fourth President and the principal author of the U.S. Constitution, as he warns:



*“Of all the enemies of true liberty, war is, perhaps, the most to be dreaded, because it comprises and develops the germ of every other. No nation can preserve its freedom in the midst of continual warfare.”*

Madison’s warning that warfare leads to the destruction of freedom has clearly been lost on the leaders who are controlling today’s foreign and domestic policy. Or perhaps they are fully aware of the freedoms being lost, but are willing to sacrifice them to achieve “national security.”

**Word on the Street.** We hear spontaneous opinions from people on the street. Some are supportive of strong government action, but one woman says, “By responding with military aggression and abusing civil liberties, the United States is destroying itself and causing more harm to the nation and its citizens than any terrorist enemies could have done.”

**Principles Betrayed.** Several of our characters describe how the image of the United States as a bastion of freedom for the rights of the individual has been altered dramatically and, some fear, permanently. They spell out in stark terms the dramatic changes that have been instituted since 9/11.



Bruce Fein, Deputy Assistant Attorney General during the Reagan Administration, is among a growing number of former officials who are appalled that long-standing principles of human rights and civil liberties are being routinely ignored and abused. He says that America’s founders would shudder in disbelief at the contempt for constitutional rights that has now become the norm. He explains how and why the founders went to such great lengths to preserve the freedom of the individual, and protect against government tyranny.

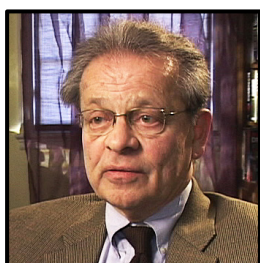
**The 9/11 Ruse.** Author and journalist Chris Hedges describes his dark vision of those who are in power and where they are leading us. “Nine-eleven became the excuse by which the corporate state could create a security and surveillance system that in essence criminalizes dissent. It eradicates, in many cases, any pretense of privacy and, in the name of the War on Terror, they were able to essentially strip us of most fundamental Constitutional rights.”



According to this concept of a transformed America, the overriding purpose of government is to defend against real or imagined enemies; where any means necessary are justified to deal with them; where security policies are defined and implemented in secret and considered exempt from the rule of law; where public discourse is carefully controlled and manipulated using methods of media control; and where the appearance of democracy is promoted while actual democratic principles are systematically dismantled.

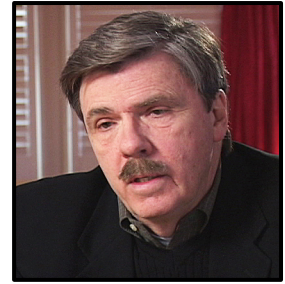
**How Did This Happen?** Our narrator poses the question: How did it happen that the country most identified for more than two centuries as the protector of justice, unalienable rights and individual freedom is being turned into an increasingly undemocratic, deceptive and aggressive nation? What are the forces, and who are the people behind this movement?

**The Historical Context.** To understand the movement that has brought us to this point, we must look back historically. We hear from several experts, including former military and intelligence officials, who describe how entrenched powers within the U.S. national security establishment have for decades advocated for an expanded military, and an unconstrained system that can pursue its objectives without having to obtain the consent of its population or account for its actions.

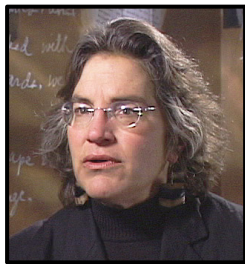


Melvin Goodman, a professor at Johns Hopkins University and former CIA analyst, explains that the creation of a “national security state” in which the military, intelligence and security sectors wield predominant influence over the government is not a new concept that was created and developed in response to 9/11. Its leaders and advocates have existed for decades within the defense establishment and the intelligence agencies, with supporters in Congress, the media and Washington think tanks.

**Overcoming the “Vietnam Syndrome.”** Robert Parry, investigative reporter and Editor at Consortium News, describes how the humiliating US defeat in Vietnam raised concerns among the power elite that the US public had become an obstacle in the way of the government being able to conduct wars and engage in aggressive foreign policy around the world. During the Reagan years, they undertook efforts to bring the American people back into line using methods of propaganda and “perception management.” The purpose was to control the information flow to keep the public from becoming alarmed by unpopular policies.



The other way to deal with an unsupportive population was to simply keep them in the dark about controversial activities. The Reagan administration conducted a secret war in Central America without informing Congress, and made secret arms deals with the Iranians until it was exposed by the Iran Contra scandal. In a dissenting opinion defending the administration, then Congressman Dick Cheney and his assistant David Addington asserted their view of an imperial presidency--that the president should be able to do whatever he feels is necessary in carrying out foreign policy. Fourteen years later, as members of the George W. Bush administration, they would finally get the chance to pursue their goals in earnest.



**The Opportunity.** Phyllis Bennis of the Institute for Policy Studies explains how a political faction known as the Neoconservatives or “Neocons” were influential during the Reagan presidency, but were unable to advance their extreme agenda in the years that followed. Once George W. Bush and Dick Cheney came to office in 2001, the Neocons and their supporters were back in power. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 gave them the “Pearl Harbor” they needed, providing a new enemy and the opportunity to push aggressively for an expanded security state with an aggressive military policy.

According to Bennis and others, a central objective of the Neocons was to use America’s superior power to achieve undisputed military and economic domination of the world. In pursuit of this objective, they proclaimed the right to attack unilaterally anywhere in the world without provocation. The 2003 invasion of Iraq was the first dramatic assertion of the principle of “preventive war.” It was intended to demonstrate the U.S. government’s willingness to use unilateral military force as it sees fit, regardless of world opinion or principles of international law.

**The Torture Coverup.** The fact that the US government designed and implemented an elaborate and secret system of arbitrary detention and torture during the George W. Bush administration has been clearly established. Yet there are still defenders who deny that what happened was actually torture. They claim that “enhanced interrogation techniques” were justified because they were successful and necessary to keep us safe from terrorists. This is despite the fact that more than 100 detainees have died during detention, many likely tortured to death.



President Obama’s refusal to support any investigation or prosecution of torture crimes has helped to further this phony narrative. Reed Brody of Human Rights Watch points out that even though Obama promised not to engage in torture, he has effectively decriminalized it and kept it as an option that he or his successor could re-implement at any time. “By refusing to prosecute, it’s as if he left the loaded gun on the table,” Brody says. “Maybe he’s not going to pick up that loaded gun and use it, but the next guy might.” Some suspect that torture is still going on secretly in places like Bagram prison in Afghanistan, and that it is being outsourced to other governments to maintain deniability.

**A Torture Victim Speaks.** It is revealing that despite Obama's supposed rejection of torture, he has not denounced the practice of "extraordinary rendition." Maher Arar, a Canadian software engineer, tells his horrifying story of being kidnapped and tortured as a victim of US rendition in 2002. While returning from a family vacation in Tunisia, he was detained without charge by U.S. authorities at New York's JFK airport while changing planes to return to his home in Canada. Even though he was innocent and had nothing to do with terrorism, the Americans secretly transported him to Syria where he was kept in an underground cell and tortured repeatedly for nearly a year.



Attorney Maria LaHood of the Center for Constitutional Rights describes the lawsuit they filed against the US government seeking compensatory damages for violating Maher Arar's constitutional and international human rights, and seeking to establish the illegality of the practice of rendition. In an appalling demonstration of the political corruption of the federal judicial system, the Federal District Court dismissed the lawsuit claiming "state secrets" privilege, and the Second Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the dismissal. The Supreme Court then declined to hear the appeal, letting the dismissal stand. Maher Arar never received an apology or acknowledgement of his innocence from the US. He and his family remain on the No Fly List, and he is prohibited from entering the United States.

Using the "state secrets" pretext, the Obama Administration has succeeded in preventing any torture victims from having their day in court, essentially immunizing torturers from any consequences for their crimes, and ensuring that future officials can engage in torture without fear of liability.

**Government Assassination.** "The Obama government thinks it can kill anybody, anytime, any place in the world, regardless of whether there's a war or not in the name of the safety of the United States," says Vincent Warren, President of the Center of Constitutional Rights. "The laws on the other hand--international law and Constitutional law--say that the government is not allowed to do that without a defensive justification, and without a reasonable threat of imminent attack. The Constitution requires that you have due process before you can be executed. Their answer is that it doesn't matter. What matters is that they are keeping us safe."

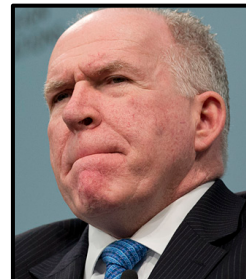


**Obama's Kill List.** The Obama Administration's program of using unmanned drone aircraft to surveil and attack suspected enemies was carried out covertly early in his first term without the knowledge of the public or many in Congress. As stories began to appear about the many people being killed in drone attacks, it became increasingly difficult to conceal that it was happening. In 2011 the New York Times revealed the existence of a White House assassination list of people to be killed. It was further revealed that, by attacking targets that fit a certain profile--so called "signature strikes"--they often do not even know whom it is they are killing. The White House adopted a convenient method of denying civilians casualties by defining all "military age males" as militants unless proven otherwise.

US Drones have been operating not just in the war zone of Afghanistan, but in at least six other countries that we know of including Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Libya, and more recently in Iraq and Syria. There have been reports of entire families being killed, of wedding parties and funerals being attacked. There have been many so-called “double taps”—where a target is attacked once, and when responders come to rescue the survivors, they themselves are targeted in a second attack.

We cut to a public forum at Johns Hopkins University in 2011, where then National Security Advisor John Brennan is responding to concerns about the drone program:

*"I can say that the types of operations that the US has been involved in, in the counterterrorism realm, that nearly for the past year there hasn't been a single collateral death because of the exceptional proficiency, precision of the capabilities that we've been able to develop."*



To those who had been investigating the effects of drone attacks, Brennan's statement was unbelievable. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, at least 2,400 people have been killed in US drone attacks, including more than 400 civilians, many of them children. Although the Administration emphasizes the “precision” of drone strikes, the human rights group Reprieve determined that US attempts to kill 47 targeted individuals resulted in the deaths of 1,147 other people. The administration claims it has the authority to kill even American citizens, without any evidence, charges or trial. To date three Americans have been killed by US drones, one of them a 16-year old boy.

**Perpetual War.** After years of conflict in Afghanistan, Iraq and a growing list of other countries, the United States now finds itself in a state of endless warfare. Officials are openly predicting that the war in Iraq and Syria will last at least 20 to 30 years. That America is destined to be at war into the next generation and beyond is now the accepted wisdom among America's political and media class.



In announcing the launch of US war against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, President Obama declared:

*"I have made it clear that we will hunt down terrorists who threaten our country wherever they are... This is a core principle of my presidency: If you threaten America, you will find no safe haven."*

In other words, there are no geographical limits to where the US will intervene. The entire world is a battlefield, including the United States itself.

What is the motivation for pursuing this ongoing warfare? Is it simply a fear of what will befall us if we do otherwise, or are there more sinister motives at play? Several of our characters argue that endless war is encouraged because it makes it easier to increase state power, erode the rights of citizens, and keep government actions secret from public view.

**The Gravy Train.** Another powerful incentive for promoting war is the huge amounts of money flowing to US military and security sectors, including the growing number of private companies supporting them.

Government agencies and private contractors saw 9/11 as a golden opportunity. As investigative journalist Robert Dreyfuss describes it, “Every authoritarian agency, police agency, the military, from the Pentagon to the various agencies said ‘Here's our opportunity to expand our budgets, to get increased authority, to pass legislation that we've been trying to pass for five years or ten years and couldn't get through Congress,’ and they got it.”







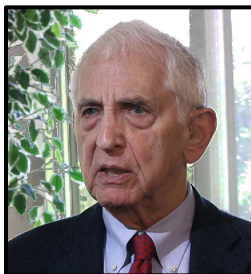
The massive amounts of taxpayer money being lavished on military and security contractors has reached a level that is unparalleled in the nation's history. Journalist William Arkin describes the investigation he and Dana Priest conducted for the Washington Post, which found that there are at least 1,200 government organizations and 1,900 private companies secretly working on counterterrorism, homeland security and intelligence in about 10,000 locations across the United States. He says that many of the agencies do the same work, creating redundancy and waste, and that no one really knows who all of them are and what they are doing.

**The Crystal City.** As we stand on the Washington DC rooftop of Tim Shorrock, author of *Spies for Hire*, he points to the Capitol skyline in the distance with its familiar landmarks, and then turns slightly to where, across the Potomac River in Arlington, sits a much more dramatic skyline with outsized buildings in what has become known as the "Crystal City." This is where a huge and growing industry of private government contractors is headquartered. According to Shorrock, about 70 percent of the national intelligence budget is now spent on the private sector. He says that to a large extent, contractors themselves are controlling US security policy and programs, and profiting immensely.



He explains how government officials use the "revolving door" to enrich themselves and their friends at taxpayer expense. While in their government positions, officials steer lucrative contracts to their associates in private industry, then often leave the government to take high paying jobs at the very companies they helped to enrich.

**Targeting the Media.** An informed citizenry has long been considered essential for a fully functioning democracy. But according to Charles Lewis, founder of the Center for Public Integrity, many government officials instead see the free flow of information as a threat to their power. He says that the domestic population is considered unworthy of being trusted with knowledge of what its government is doing. Reporters are finding it increasingly difficult to do their jobs as they and their sources are subjected to surveillance and threatened with prosecution. Lewis says that what we are seeing now is an unprecedented attack on press freedom and what amounts to a criminalizing of any journalism that is not government-approved.

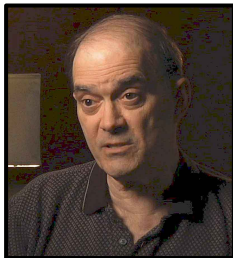


**Secrecy.** The unprecedented level of secrecy surrounding military and security policies raises the question of how the country can exercise any form of self-rule or consent of the governed when its activities are conducted in secret and hidden from public view. Daniel Ellsberg, famous for releasing the Pentagon Papers in 1971, warns us against the government's growing obsession with secrecy. He says that much of what is kept secret is for the purpose of concealing criminal activity, corruption and incompetence, and to enable authorities to do as they

please without having to provide justification or obtain consent from the public. Putting policies into effect without the public's knowledge has become a successful tactic for accomplishing unpopular objectives that would otherwise never be approved or tolerated. Both the Bush and Obama administrations have created "secret law" and secret legal interpretations to justify normally illegal actions without the public's knowledge.

**Whistleblowers.** According to Ellsberg, as the wall of government secrecy is tightened, one of the only remaining ways of exposing abuse is from insiders who, out of conscience, choose to publicly reveal wrongdoing they discover. The Obama White House and the Justice Department view the threat from whistleblowers with growing alarm and desperation. Their reaction has been to use every means available to stop them. The resulting persecution and intimidation of whistleblowers is unparalleled in U.S. history. By making examples out of violators with heavy-handed prosecutions and long prison sentences, authorities are successfully creating a climate of fear among personnel in government agencies. Despite these efforts, insiders are still coming forward, and we are likely to see many more courageous whistleblowers, particularly among the younger generation.

**Personal Stories.** We hear from four former NSA officials who tried to expose the illegality and corruption they witnessed. They describe what they went through, and what happened to them as a result.



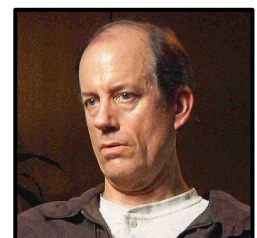
Bill Binney and Kirk Wiebe resigned in protest over the NSA's secret mass spying on US citizens in 2001. They made an attempt to go through "official channels" to raise their concerns. In retaliation, they were investigated by the FBI and had their homes raided at gunpoint and their computers and papers confiscated.



Russell Tice was fired from his job at NSA in 2005 after raising questions about illegal domestic spying. He says that he witnessed NSA surveillance on prominent politicians, journalists, judges and military leaders.

According to his sources at NSA, the contents of every domestic phone call and email are now being recorded and archived at a giant NSA data center in Bluffdale, Utah.

Thomas Drake, another high-ranking NSA official who objected to illegal and corrupt activity, was raided by the FBI, prosecuted by the Justice Department, charged with espionage and threatened with a 35-year prison sentence on trumped-up charges. The evidence against him was shown to be fabricated, and he ended up plea-bargaining on a misdemeanor charge with no prison time. Nonetheless, his career was successfully destroyed, and he was ruined financially.



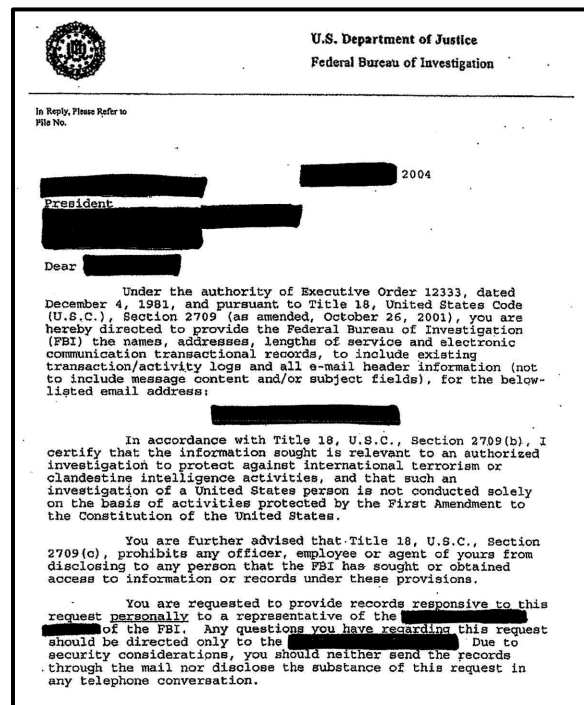
**Eliminating Privacy.** The information revealed by Edward Snowden showed what many had suspected for years—that the NSA is an out-of-control agency that operates without respect for the law or constitutional rights, and without any meaningful oversight or controls. Most of the media attention around the Snowden revelations focused on the NSA's bulk collection of phone records, or "metadata." As shocking as that was, it is only part of a broad pattern of rampant spying and data collection worldwide. NSA's own internal documents confirm that their objective is to "collect it all." It can accurately be said that a goal of the NSA is to eliminate any form of human privacy anywhere in the world.

**Phony Reform.** For those who hoped that Congress would use its power to bring NSA under control and stop surveillance abuses, the reality has been the opposite. What started as a widely supported bill to stop phone metadata collection, the USA Freedom Act was watered down to create the appearance of “reform”, while preserving, and in some ways even expanding surveillance powers. The strategy has been to submit to minor changes and portray them as significant reform in order to reassure the public that the abuses have been brought under control--all for the purpose of preserving as much as possible NSA’s unrestrained power.

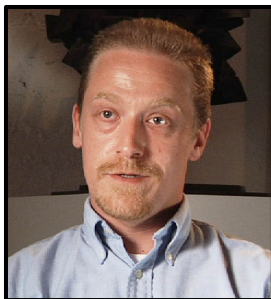
**Death of the Fourth Amendment.** A little-known provision in the Patriot Act allows federal authorities to secretly serve written orders without warrants to individuals and organizations demanding information and records. Civil liberties advocates say that this is a blatant violation of the Fourth Amendment’s requirement for judicial warrants based on probable cause.

The FBI has been issuing tens of thousands of these “National Security Letters” (NSLs) each year, essentially conscripting people to become secret informants for the government, under the threat of imprisonment if they fail to cooperate.

Recipients of the NSLs are gagged from telling anyone that they received the orders. Because of the gag orders, we know very little about the thousands of people that have been served with NSLs.



We were able to talk with two NSL recipients who courageously refused to remain silent and publicly challenged what they see as a blatant violation of the constitutional rights to privacy and freedom of speech.



Nick Merrill, who runs a small Internet service provider in New York, describes his experience of receiving an NSL from the FBI demanding that he provide detailed information about his customers. Merrill was surprised by this demand, and refused to comply. He enlisted help from the ACLU, which sued the FBI and the Justice Department. The court ruled that the national security letter statute was unconstitutional, which led Congress to amend the law to allow recipients to challenge the NSLs. The court also ruled that the FBI must prove national security harm if a recipient resists the gag order.

George Christian, who works for the statewide library system in Connecticut, was served with an NSL demanding records of library users. He tells us why he refused to comply, and decided to challenge the gag order. After nearly a year, the FBI gave up and dropped its defense, abandoning the NSL and the gag order. Christian believes that the government gave in out of fear that the court decision would rule against the FBI. In reflecting on his experience, Christian says that it is not enough to rely on the Constitution to protect us. “The Constitution only works if we stand up and insist that it be upheld.”



**Accountability.** As the White House and Justice Department continue to tolerate and conceal war crimes committed by political elites and those following their orders, it becomes increasingly apparent that there is a two-tiered justice system in the US. Members of the political class are largely immune from accountability for criminal actions, while common citizens are subjected to what is becoming the most draconian judicial and imprisonment system in the world, with nearly 25% of the world's prison population, most



of them minorities and minor drug offenders, many in solitary confinement.



Reed Brody describes the efforts by Human Rights Watch and others to have US torture crimes prosecuted abroad under the principle of "universal jurisdiction." As he explains, "Under international law, there are times when you can arrest people without probable cause. In war you can kill people. But torture is something you can never do, ever. And the U.S. has ratified the international convention on torture that says that."

Thomas Blanton, Director of the National Security Archive at George Washington University warns that, "Human rights activists around the world are going to pursue the people who built that torture program for the US. President Bush, Vice President Cheney, David Addington, John Yoo--these are *persona non grata* in most countries of the world. Eyes are on them, and eyes are watching them. A measure of justice will prevail, but it may take decades."



**"Trust Us"** Officials tell us not to worry about these vast new powers in the hands of our country's leaders. We are told that they are necessary to "keep us safe," and that we should trust them because they are looking out for us and would never abuse their powers and turn them against us. But investigative journalist Tim Shorrock warns that, even if you find this reassuring, the apparatus now being constructed creates the opportunity for a future tyrant to use the massive military, police and surveillance power to easily and quickly transform the country into a police state. All the tools for turnkey totalitarianism are there for whomever might be tempted to use them.

**A Critical Time.** As the story unfolds and we learn more about how the nation is being transformed, we feel a growing sense of tension and conflict between the opposing forces of authoritarianism and individual freedom. We come to realize that we're at a critical point in America's history.

**The Challenge.** The film closes with a question, and a challenge: Will the dramatic changes of the last decade become irreversible and permanent, or will Americans wake up to the reality of where they are headed and begin a mass movement to restore democracy and the rule of law? Otherwise, as Bruce Fein warns, "The magnificent achievement that America's founders fought and struggled for, and which survived for more than two centuries, will have died without a fight."

As sobering as this scenario is, we are nonetheless left with a feeling of empowerment and hope, and an inspiration to "do something." Chris Hedges, Andrew Bacevich, Ben Ferencz and others describe what they have done, and why it is the responsibility of every citizen to do what they can to protect our rights.

[End Treatment]

[See page 14 for links to footage samples.](#)

## PROJECT STATUS

**Current Status/Timeline.** The majority of location shooting is now complete. More than 30 interviews have been recorded in eleven U.S. cities, including Washington DC, New York, Boston and San Francisco. The post-production phase has begun, with footage being organized, logged and transcribed. A four-minute trailer is now complete, which provides a sample of the film's style, content and characters. Preliminary segment rough cuts, and a sample reel for fundraising purposes are in process. Research and planning is underway for archival footage and materials, and for additional interviews and B-roll shooting. Fundraising efforts are continuing. If expected funding is realized, we plan to complete additional shooting in February 2015, with final completion expected by the third quarter of 2015.

## PRODUCING ORGANIZATION

*Seizing Power* is produced by the Empowerment Project, an award-winning production group that has been making documentary films on social and political issues for more than 25 years. Its documentaries have been widely distributed to theatrical, television, educational and retail video markets both in the US and abroad. Among its many awards is the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature in 1992 for *The Panama Deception*. The Empowerment Project is a 501(C)(3) non-profit organization, so donations are eligible for income tax deduction.

## KEY PERSONNEL

### **David Kasper** Director/Editor

David Kasper's experience as a producer, director, writer, editor, and cinematographer has involved him in hundreds of media productions over the past 34 years. His documentary work on social and political issues has taken him to Central America, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, Iraq, Israel and the Palestinian territories. Kasper is a founder of the Empowerment Project, where he currently works as Executive Director. He is a winner of the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature in 1992 for *The Panama Deception*, which he produced, wrote and edited. His other documentary credits include: *Destination Nicaragua*, Director/Editor (1984); *Coverup: Behind the Iran Contra Affair*, Producer/Editor (1988); *Is War the Answer*, Director/Editor (2001); *Gatewood: Facing the White Canvas*, Producer/Director (2004); *Soldiers Speak Out*, Director/Editor (2006).

### **Wendy White** Producer

Wendy White is an entrepreneur and consultant who brings 25 years of experience in organizational strategy, project management, large scale community engagement and dialogue facilitation to the team. She is highly regarded for her skill and talent to inspire and motivate personnel, and to strengthen organizational cultures, structures and relationships. She has consulted for many non-profit and corporate clients, and has produced a variety of community programs and events.

### **Barbara Trent** Production Consultant

Barbara Trent is an Oscar-winning filmmaker with a 25-year background in documentary production and media activism. Barbara's film and video work grew out of her earlier experience in community organizing and social activism. She speaks internationally at conferences, festivals and college campuses on issues of democracy, media and filmmaking. Her film credits include: the Oscar-winning *The Panama Deception*, Director (1992), *Coverup: Behind the Iran-Contra Affair*, Director (1988); *Destination Nicaragua*, Director (1984); *Viva La Paz*, Producer (1986); and *Bus to Topanga*, Director (1983).

**David Tyson** Camera/Lighting Director

David Tyson has over twenty years of experience as a television writer, producer and cinematographer. His credits include: Director of Photography and Editor at the CNN Rome Bureau, (1980-81); *Jerry Falwell*, Director of Photography (A&E, 2001); *February One*, Videographer (PBS, 2005); *Behind the Scenes of Dawson's Creek*, Director of Photography (E!, 1999); *The USS Iowa Explosion*, Videographer (History Channel, 1999);

**Mark Barroso** Production Consultant

Mark Barroso works as a producer of story elements and packaged stories for network and local news and magazine shows. His credits include: Segment Producer for *The Today Show*, *NBC Nightly News*, MSNBC, *Good Morning America* (1992 to present); recipient of three Emmy awards as Producer of investigative reports for WTSP, St. Peterburg, Florida (1986-89).

**Eve Goldberg** Story Consultant/Contributing Editor

Eve Goldberg has worked as producer, director, writer and editor on dozens of film, television, and video productions. Her credits include: *Coverup: Behind the Iran Contra Affair*, Writer/Editor, *Legacy of the Hollywood Blacklist*, Writer/Editor (PBS); *Real People*, Writer/Editor (NBC); *Ripley's Believe It or Not*, Editor (ABC); *Amazing Moments*, Producer (National Geographic); *Penny Power*, Editor (HBO).

## OUTREACH and STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

**Target Audiences.** The project is designed to appeal to a broad audience, including those who are knowledgeable, as well as those who are uninformed, but concerned and curious about the subject. We are specifically targeting communities that are active around the issues covered in the film. These audiences are broken down into specific subject areas, such as surveillance, detention, secrecy, whistleblowing and accountability.

The documentary will appeal not only to people in the U.S., but to foreign markets as well. In recent years, people around the world have become increasingly concerned about U.S. government abuse and how it affects them. This film will increase their ability to raise awareness and take action in their own countries.

The *Seizing Power* outreach effort began over a year ago with the creation of a project [website](#), blog and social media presence. The website was developed as an information and education tool to provide target audiences with background information on the issues addressed in the film. We recruited followers using [Facebook](#) and existing lists, and we've been keeping them informed with the *Seizing Power* [blog](#). Fans are invited to follow our progress as we travel the country to conduct interviews, attend events and continue with project development.

We are in the process of hosting a series of house parties, discussions and fundraising events as we forge partnerships with activist organizations early in the process. In July 2014, we held a work in process screening and discussion at the Veterans for Peace annual [Convention](#) in Asheville, NC. We have also been attending topic related conferences and events to continue to build our knowledge and network of supporters.

As the film gets closer to completion, an outreach plan will be implemented including press releases, publicity campaigns, public appearances and contacts with our list of strategic partners and target audiences. We will support and encourage special screenings by participating groups, and leverage the Empowerment Project's network of universities interested in hosting screening events and lectures.

## AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

We are developing a national audience engagement campaign in partnership with organizations involved in education and activism around the core issues. The campaign will carry out specific methods of reaching and engaging the target audiences that can help further the goals of the project and move audiences from passive observers to active involvement to achieve identifiable outcomes.

**Finding Common Ground.** The issues covered in this film appeal not just to those who support human rights activism, but also to a broad cross-section of political opinions and attitudes. Many people who would otherwise have strong disagreements can find common ground on these questions. For example, those who identify with Libertarian or Tea Party doctrines emphatically oppose many of the objectives of liberals and progressives, and vice versa. Nonetheless, when it comes to government invasion into our private lives, secrecy, arbitrary detention and expanded militarism, they tend to agree. The engagement campaign will work to unite and mobilize these diverse groups, and encourage widespread involvement in advocating for new solutions.

**Professional Consultants.** We have contracted with [Continuum Consulting Services](#) to design and implement key elements of the outreach campaign. Continuum has extensive experience with successful community engagement efforts. We are also in discussions with Working Films to provide additional advice and guidance. Working Films is well known for their pioneering work in outreach and audience engagement for issue-oriented films.

**Engagement Processes & Tools.** To help facilitate the engagement process, we will produce short video pieces from existing content in the documentary to function as stand-alone modules for organizers, activists and educators to use in their work around specific issues. These will include topics such as detention and torture; government surveillance; secrecy and whistleblowers; accountability; and drone warfare.

Study guides and reference notes will be created as part of the modules, in consultation with participating organizations. The *Seizing Power* website will include educational components, engagement resources, and a toolkit consisting of facilitator guides, PowerPoint slides, dialogue starters and publicity materials that can be tailored to particular groups and events.

**Call to Action.** The documentary will be used to educate and inspire people to action. Too often, people who are genuinely concerned feel that they have little power to influence political outcomes. We will attempt to dispel this attitude by highlighting a number of examples showing the ways that individuals and groups can take effective action, and encouraging exploration of new social action methods. It will include a listing of groups that are active in different areas that people can support and work with.

**Partners.** We have been in touch with several activist organizations that are interested in participating in the project's outreach and audience engagement efforts on a national scale. These include [Veterans for Peace](#), which has offered to leverage their nationwide network for screenings and dialogue; the [CATO Institute](#), which is interested in hosting a work in progress event that will be streamed to their membership; [The World Can't Wait](#), which has offered to consult on engagement strategies, and is interested in co-hosting community events. In addition, a number of other organizations will be invited to participate in the project's outreach efforts.

## MARKETING

**Festivals.** The documentary will be entered in a number of film festivals both in the United States and abroad to create a festival tour. We will support and coordinate publicity efforts with festival organizers, and arrange for the filmmakers to be available for personal appearances at selected festivals.

**Theatrical.** We are seeking an agreement with a distributor for a national release to movie theaters. Theater runs will be supported with organizing and publicity campaigns in coordination with local activist organizations. The filmmakers and expert personalities will be available for live appearances at theaters, and in local media.

**Television.** A television broadcast agreement will be sought with a national cable/satellite network. Following a period of exclusivity with such an agreement, the program will be made available to other interested networks on an exclusive or non-exclusive basis, and finally to individual public TV stations via one of the public TV satellite distribution centers.

**Home Video and Educational.** We will seek agreements with distributors for both retail and educational sales. The film will be available for sale on the *Seizing Power* website in both a downloadable version and via direct mail DVD sales. We will also contract with video on demand services such as Netflix, Hulu, iTunes and Fandor.

**Foreign Distribution.** Foreign television is expected to be a major part of the documentary's overall distribution, with the potential to surpass audience exposure in the United States. We expect to secure national TV sales to English-speaking countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as to non-English speaking countries. We will support requests for translation into foreign languages by providing translation-ready versions, and if necessary producing foreign language versions in their entirety.

## LINKS to VIDEO SAMPLES

*Seizing Power* Trailer, 4 minutes

Link: <https://vimeo.com/69289973>

The following three sequences consist of clips from the existing footage, as examples of content, with no music, narration or visuals. The clips are assembled in a logical order, but do not indicate finished style or quality.

Footage Sample 1: *Secrecy* 3:48

Link: <https://vimeo.com/105062965>

Footage Sample 2: *Surveillance* 6:44

Link: <https://vimeo.com/104348323>

Footage Sample 3: *Torture & Accountability* 5:16

Link: <https://vimeo.com/104359588>

Previous completed work: *The Panama Deception*

This 90-minute documentary won the Oscar for Best Documentary Feature in 1992. The journalistic exposé style is similar to what we envision for *Seizing Power*.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/104265898> Password: catapult



## FUNDRAISING SOURCES & STRATEGY

A total of \$57,035 has been raised so far, most of which has been spent on the costs of pre-production and principle shooting. In addition, there have been in-kind contributions totaling \$18,020. We have identified several other sources that provide strong potential for additional funding (below). We will also appeal to our existing donor base with mailings, and conduct a number of fundraising events. We are optimistic that this strategy can be successful in raising the total budget of \$333,716.

### Funds Secured to Date (as of November 2014):

Mericos Foundation	\$25,000
Continuum Consulting	\$10,000
CANDIL	\$2,200
Charitable Gift Fund	\$2,000
Indiegogo Campaign	\$1,400
Janet Morrow	\$1,800
Other Individual Donors	\$14,635
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Total Secured to Date	\$57,035

### In-Kind Contributions

Dan Glucksman: New York City Lodging	\$2,900
Irwin Corey: New York City Lodging	\$2,200
Continuum Consulting: Wash. DC Lodging	\$2,700
Mark Barroso: Location Production Equip.	\$2,300
Rachel Raney: Production Consulting	\$800
Mark Barroso: Production Consulting	\$1,700
David Tyson: Director of Photography	\$1,000
Wendy White: Private Vehicle Mileage	\$320
Arley Wolber: Post Production Assistant	\$700
Chris Thayer: Transcriptions	\$1,300
Arley Wolber: Transcriptions	\$1,200
Irwin Corey: Crew Meals	\$900
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Total In-Kind Contributions	\$18,020

### Potential Additional Funding Sources:

Bertha BRITDOC Fund	\$50,000
Creative Capital	\$40,000
Sundance Documentary Fund	\$40,000
Just Films	\$25,000
Cinereach	\$50,000
Tribeca Film Institute	\$50,000
Impact Partners	\$40,000
Kruidenier Foundation	\$30,000
Catapult Foundation	\$20,000
Fledgling Fund	\$15,000
Paul Robeson Fund	\$10,000
Park Foundation	\$25,000
Fundraising Events	\$15,000
Individual Donors	\$20,000
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Total Potential Funding	\$430,000