

# Spying and Social Control: U.S. Government Labels Dissent As Terrorism

In 1972, the CIA Director Relabelled “Dissidents” As “Terrorists” So He Could Continue Spying On Them ... And Nothing Has Changed

By [Washington's Blog](#)

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Region: [USA](#)

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[For 500 years](#), government spying has *always* aimed at crushing dissent.

Likewise, the U.S. government has long used anti-terror laws to [crush dissent and protect the powers-that-be](#).

As Edward Snowden said:

These programs were never about terrorism: they're about economic spying, social control, and diplomatic manipulation. They're about power.

[He's right](#). And [see this](#).

Indeed, the government arbitrarily [labels anyone it doesn't like - including American citizens - as "terrorists"](#).

As PrivacySOS [notes](#) (via [ACLU](#)):

[Washington Post reporter] Betty Medsger's new book on the Citizens' Commission to Investigate the FBI, "[The Burglary](#)", contains some relevant and largely suppressed history. In the wake of the Media, PA burglary and the subsequent newspaper articles exposing J. Edgar Hoover's red squad surveillance programs, some CIA officers began to voice dissent internally about their own agency's troubling domestic operations, codenamed MHCHAOS. In 1972, Medsger writes, CIA director Richard Helms

called his top aides together and said he was adamant that MHCHAOS would not be "stopped simply because some members of the organization [the CIA] do not like this activity." He made changes in order to protect the program more now that the [dissident officers were] so determined to have it end. To the maximum extent possible, within the agency, the program and the agent then in charge of it, Richard Ober, would be identified with terrorism and not with American dissidents. The massive program would in fact have the same functions it always had, including the monitoring and destruction of the more than five hundred alternative newspapers staffs it had under surveillance. (At the same time, the FBI also monitored alternative and campus newspapers, sometimes suppressing them.)

Henceforth, Colby wrote in a memorandum after that meeting, the label "international terrorist" would replace "political dissident" as the target of the CIA's illegal domestic operations. As part of this image transformation, Helms did what Hoover had done many times—and would do again in April 1971 to protect COINTELPRO when he thought it was about to be revealed—to minimize the possibility that secret operations would be exposed. Helms ended MHCHAOS in name, but continued it in reality with a new name: International Terrorism Group. It would be much easier for people, including people within the CIA, to accept the domestic operations if they thought they were aimed primarily at stopping terrorism rather than at stopping dissent.

It's common to hear law enforcement officials describe non-violent activists as terrorists today.

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