



Written by [John and Nisha Whitehead](#) on August 29, 2026

The Bunker State: The Government Will Survive, but Will the Constitution?

What began publicly as Donald Trump's lavish, taxpayer-funded vision of a gilded White House ballroom is now being justified by the administration — in and out of court — as [a matter of national security](#).

To President Trump, it seems, a ballroom by any other name is a [bunker](#).

And what a bunker it is.

Court documents indicate the [massive subterranean military complex](#) being constructed five stories beneath the White House grounds will include bomb shelters, a hospital, "top secret military structures and equipment, military-grade venting, a single integrated air conditioning and heating system, [sniper nests and a drone port on top](#)."



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Stephen Miller, Trump's White House Deputy Chief of Staff, has explicitly invoked "[continuity-of-government interests](#)" in defending the ballroom/bunker project, arguing that the reinforced underground military installation is necessary to ensure uninterrupted presidential command during an attack or global crisis.

It is telling that they are building it at [breakneck speed](#).

The message seems clear: get far enough along, fast enough, and it becomes that much harder for Congress, the courts or some future administration to undo what has already been built.

There is a lesson in that, and it speaks to much more than a ballroom or a bunker.

That is how the architecture of authoritarian government becomes permanent: Build the surveillance system. Build the detention centers. Expand the raids. Normalize executive rule by decree. Weaken the courts. Sideline Congress. Militarize the machinery of enforcement. Then hand it all to the next administration.

The faces change. The powers remain.

So much of what Trump is using today was inherited from presidents before him. So much of what he is building now will remain available to presidents after him.

That is the deeper problem with the Bunker State.

It is not merely about where government officials go when disaster strikes.

It is about the mindset of a government that increasingly treats preservation of its own power as the highest form of national security.



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That is the bunker mentality in practice.

And Continuity of Government gives it a blueprint to follow.

Continuity of Government planning, or COG, was devised during the Cold War to ensure that the federal government could survive a Soviet nuclear attack. If Washington were destroyed, surviving officials would disperse to secure locations, maintain command and eventually reconstitute constitutional government.

The goal, at least in theory, was survival long enough to restore constitutional order.

But 9/11 changed the equation.

Nearly twenty-five years later, we are still living with the consequences.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, did more than kill nearly 3,000 people. They gave Washington the crisis it needed to dramatically expand emergency powers, surveillance and the national-security state.

COG was part of that transformation.

The government has spent billions making certain that it can survive almost anything. But survival of the government is not the same as preservation of the republic.

Presidents, agencies, military commands, intelligence operations and critical records can all be relocated so that the machinery of government can keep functioning underground.

But what about the Constitution?

That is the question all of this elaborate government survival planning never answers satisfactorily. Who guarantees that Congress remains meaningful, the courts independent, elections intact, emergency powers temporary and the rights of the people protected?

Those questions matter because COG is no longer merely about bunkers.

It is part of a much larger [emergency state](#) — a government that has learned to govern through crisis, fear and claims of necessity.

The emergencies change. The response does not: government claims extraordinary powers, and the extraordinary gradually becomes ordinary.

This is the real danger of a government accustomed to governing by emergency: the trigger does not have to be Armageddon. It can be terrorism, a cyberattack, a pandemic, civil disorder or some broadly defined threat to national security. It merely has to be a crisis serious enough for those in power to declare that ordinary rules can no longer apply.

The most dangerous words in government are often some variation of: this is an emergency.

That is when temporary measures become precedents, precedents become policies, and policies become permanent powers.

Trump did not invent the Bunker State. He inherited it — and he is expanding it while further erasing the lines between presidential power, personal power and the national interest.

The government beneath Trump was built over decades, with the complicity of presidents, Congresses and courts that repeatedly allowed extraordinary powers to become permanent.

And behind it all sits another government — a shadow government — that elections rarely disturb.



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More than a decade ago, we warned that America effectively had two shadow governments: Continuity of Government, the emergency government waiting in the wings for catastrophe, and the Deep State, the permanent government that carries on regardless of who occupies the White House.

Today, it's hard to tell them apart.

Under ordinary circumstances, these systems may appear to operate separately.

Under emergency conditions, they can become one.

That is how the permanent state becomes the emergency state. And that is when Continuity of Government becomes Continuity of Tyranny.

A government that already possesses mass surveillance, militarized police, detention powers, biometric tracking, drones and facial recognition does not need to invent the machinery of authoritarian control during an emergency.

It already has it.

All an emergency does is change the rules governing how freely that machinery can be used.

As we make clear in [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and its fictional counterpart [The Erik Blair Diaries](#), when a constitutional republic adopts a bunker mindset, government survival becomes the priority, and constitutional survival becomes an afterthought.

If constitutional government cannot survive above ground, in ordinary times, when the courts are open, Congress is sitting and elections are still being held, there is little reason to believe it will somehow be resurrected underground in the wake of a national catastrophe.

What deserves continuity is not merely the federal bureaucracy.

What deserves continuity is the Constitution. The separation of powers. The rule of law. Representative government. Due process. Habeas corpus. The rights of the people.

That is what must survive.

And if we cannot preserve those things now — before the sirens sound, before the government retreats underground, before some president invokes the next great emergency — then no bunker, however deep, however secure and however lavishly equipped, will save the republic.

Because the Constitution cannot survive in a bunker underground if we have already allowed it to die above ground.

About John & Nisha Whitehead:

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