Soon after the onset of the Cold War, bureaucrats began to design elaborate, expensive and secret Doomsday projects to ensure “Continuity of Government.” In 1953, Raven Rock, a massive underground “alternative Pentagon,” located 65 miles from Washington, D.C., became operational.

A year later, workers began to transform Mount Weather, a forecasting facility in Virginia, into a bunker that could house the civilian arm of government.

In 1962, an “off the books ghost structure,” with the code name CASPER, was deemed ready to house members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate (and provide them with a medical clinic, dental services, a 400 seat cafeteria, three 25,000-gallon water tanks and air filters to scrub out radiation) during an emergency.

Also among the ever-multiplying Continuity of Government structures was one with a 22,500-square-foot vault that held 9-foot-tall stacks of cash totaling about $4 billion, to enable the Federal Reserve to provide money, credit and liquidity after a nuclear attack.

Terrifying and timely

Graff raises important questions about Doomsday planning. Post-disaster scenarios, he suggests, have been, perhaps inevitably, predicated on the assumption of an executive branch dictatorship that would draw on sweeping and extralegal emergency powers.

Role of secrecy
Given the likelihood of full-scale destruction, the massive logistical challenges and the expense, he wonders whether it made or makes sense to build super-fortresses to ensure “continuity of government.”

Raven Rock also asks readers to consider the ever-increasing role of secrecy, not only in Doomsday planning, but in the national security agencies that have proliferated since the end of World War II.

In the 1960s, for example, the Justice Department’s “Emergency Detention Program” gave the green light to suspension of habeas corpus; blanket provisions for the arrest and search of both citizens and aliens who were deemed dangerous; and the deportation of “non-dangerous aliens,” including students and tourists.

Planners kept “Operation Alert” secret, Graff indicates, in no small measure because they realized it might well cause “a real storm of controversy.”

Flaws in planning
A storm of controversy might have arisen as well in the 1980s, if the report of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which suggested that “Blacks, Hispanics, and Orientals” were likely to report “a greater problem in being accepted in crisis relocation centers” had been subject to public discussion.

When the Cold War ended, Graff indicates, many but by no means all Continuity of Government operations were scaled back or shut down. “You feel like you are walking into a dinosaur,” an enlisted man stationed at Raven Rock from 1988-1992 declared.

9/11, however, revealed the flaws in Continuity of Government planning – and ushered in a wide array of secret operations, “standby authorities,” and procedures for replacing members of Congress, most of them established in the name of national security.

Shadow government?
Doomsday prepping and shadow government provisions, Graff indicates, are now “bigger, stronger, and more robust than ever,” and hidden beneath “innocuous sounding” entities like “Balanced Survivability Assessment.”

Asked whether a shadow government is in place, President Bush asked, in jest, “A shadowy government or a shadow government?”
Garrett Graff is not laughing. “Until an unthinkable catastrophe happens,” he warns, we will not know whether martial law, enemy detention and rationing will be pulled off the shelf. Or what the phrase “Enduring Constitutional Government” really means.

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