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## With a Whisper, Not a Bang ★ why silently Bush signs parts of Patriot Act II into law -- stealthily

by David Martin

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On December 13, when U.S. forces captured Saddam Hussein, President George W. Bush not only celebrated with his national security team, but also pulled out his pen and signed into law a bill that grants the FBI sweeping new powers. A White House spokesperson explained the curious timing of the signing -- on a Saturday -- as "the President signs bills seven days a week." But the last time Bush signed a bill into law on a Saturday happened more than a year ago -- on a spending bill that the President needed to sign, to prevent shutting down the federal government the following Monday.

By signing the bill on the day of Hussein's capture, Bush effectively consigned a dramatic expansion of the USA Patriot Act to a mere footnote. Consequently, while most Americans watched as Hussein was probed for head lice, few were aware that the FBI had just obtained the power to probe their financial records, even if the feds don't suspect their involvement in crime or terrorism.

The Bush Administration and its Congressional allies tucked away these new executive powers in the Intelligence Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004 [H.R. 2417] [1], a legislative behemoth that funds all the intelligence activities of the federal government. The Act included a simple, yet insidious, redefinition of "financial institution," which previously referred to banks, but now includes stockbrokers, car dealerships, casinos, credit card companies, insurance agencies, jewelers, airlines, the U.S. Post Office, and any other business "whose cash transactions have a high degree of usefulness in criminal, tax, or regulatory matters."