

Arresting Political Capital After 9-11

By Douglas Stewart

COMMENTARY | Do a quick query on your favorite search engine for "political changes since 9-11." Go ahead, I'll wait. Did you notice how the vast majority of the results are from left-leaning publications? Even an amateur conspiracy theorist can point to those results and adopt it as definitive proof of a conspiracy. However, the reality is that the voices of opponents always tend to be the loudest and echo to near infinity. Which is precisely why it is so hard to get an objective assessment on how our country changed, politically, in a post-9/11 world.

Dig through the results. Go past the opinions at the [World Socialist Web Site](#) and the semi-delusional [rantings](#) of Cindy Sheehan. Eventually you will cross paths with a more rational approach and outlook. The CATO Institute, as early as 2002, had shown in its brief report (Palmer/Samples 2002 [PDF](#)) how nearly every association with any political ties came out of the woodwork requesting funding.

Ari Fleischer noted that "Virtually every special interest in Washington has been hard at work crafting specious justifications for more subsidies on the grounds that they will be helpful in combating terrorism." Under the broad argument for increased national security, even beef makes the cut, right behind police and fire department federal subsidies.

Since federal funding for police and firefighters seems to be easy enough to justify, should food have made the cut? Obviously Congress thought so. As the CATO brief points out, peanut subsidies were increased an additional \$284 million. The people's protein levels were equated with protection and overall national security.

The CATO brief did well to warn on the expansion of the federal bureaucracy. But since the warning in 2002, the growth has not slowed. By 2006, Homeland Security became a "booming" business, surpassing movies and the music industry in annual revenue, as [reported](#) by USA Today. In the past decade, nearly any action could be tossed under the rubric of national security unchallenged. September 11 gave extraordinary political capital not to any party specifically but broadly to the entire federal government. But the further we move away from the tragic event, the less patience people have with new national security measures.

The airport body scanners have become the de facto litmus test for citizen tolerance. And they may in fact be representative of the turning point. Countless examples of mishandling, intrusion of private/personal space lead to videos of protest being published in rapid succession online. Unlike most protests, these were not done by any political group. There were no handmade signs for the most part and no specifically identified political groups. These were mothers and fathers who realized something was seriously wrong on the their last visit to an airport. This is the start of the arresting of the political capital gained from 9-11.

The amount of literature written in regards to the expansion of political capital since September 11 can fill a small library. The study "Escalating U.S. Police Surveillance since 9/11" ([PDF](#)) from Surveillance and Society concluded that the direct result has been loss of privacy and overall freedom. That was four years ago. Now the public is rapidly moving toward the opinion that the advantages the federal government gained immediately after 9-11 need to be reevaluated.

Takeaways

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