

# USA Patriot Act

*A Legislative History of the Uniting and  
Strengthening of America by Providing  
Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept  
and Obstruct Terrorism Act,*

*Public Law No. 107-56 (2001)*

*By Bernard D. Reams*



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**S**eries IV continues the publication of Series I, II, and III, on all legislative activity involving the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001, known as the USA PATRIOT Act, enacted October 25, 2001.

This series consists of supplemental volumes that contain documents which show the continuing legislative activity on the USA PATRIOT Act. Much of the material included centers on deliberations over the question of which parts of this legislation should be extended or allowed to expire. The time period covered spans from October 2009 to June 2015.

The series contains the text of the four acts that amended the USA PATRIOT Act from 2009 to 2016, their bill versions, related bills, congressional debate, related hearings and reports, and presidential statements.

The Act represents the most sweeping enhancement of police, intelligence, and law enforcement powers since World War II. **Perhaps the most controversial section of the Act was Section 215, which deals with a very narrow, implied right of federal investigators to access library and bookstore records.** It allowed the FBI to obtain a warrant *in camera* (in secret) from the United State Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court for library or bookstore records of anyone connected to an investigation of international terrorism or spying. On its face, the section does not even refer to "libraries," but rather to business records and other tangible items in general. Civil libertarians and librarians in particular argue that this provision violates patrons' human rights and it has now come to be called the "**library provision.**" The Justice Department defends Section 215 by saying it provides better protection for libraries because it requires an order to be issued by a FISA Court Judge.

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## Series I

National security became a top priority for the government following the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. The U.S. Congress proceeded quickly to enact measures requested by the Bush Administration on the immediate and long-term security, recovery, and financial needs of the United States. On Oct. 25, 2001, President Bush signed the USA PATRIOT Act, stating that this anti-terrorism statute greatly increased police and intelligence power in the "most sweeping enhancements to law enforcement powers since World War II."

Series I includes legislative history, all previous bill versions, presidential statements, Attorney General statements, debates in Congress, all related documents, and congressional hearings.

## Series II

Series II concentrates on what happened after the Act was implemented, though like Series I, it includes legislation leading up to its enactment. It also contains major legislation such as the Reauthorization of the USA PATRIOT Act, which was adopted March 9, 2006, assuring a continued major impact on all aspects of American life.

The law also expands the FBI's wiretapping and electronic surveillance authority and grants police the power to search people's homes, secretly explore their business records, and eavesdrop on telephone and computer conversations. In addition, the Act forbids citizens from harboring individuals they "should have known" belonged to certain terrorist groups, even when the extent of their involvement in providing food, shelter, education, and other humanitarian aid to an otherwise oppressed people.

## Series III

Series III continues the publication of Series I and II, on all legislative activity involving the Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act of 2001, known as the USA PATRIOT Act, enacted October 25, 2001.

This series centers on deliberations over which parts of this legislation should be extended or allowed to expire. When drafted, the Act had a sunset clause - a provision that terminates all or portions of the law after a specific date unless further legislative action is taken to extend it. One of the challenges facing this reauthorization, which took place in 2006, was the perceived civil liberties intrusions.

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