



## Clear and Present Danger

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There is no doubt that Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes rendered his most important service to the American democratic process when he insisted in 1919 that only a “clear and present danger” could justify Congressional interference with freedom of speech. Holmes’s phrase entered into American jurisprudence as the legal standard with which to assess the constitutional validity of any action by the government of the United States or its agents. Indeed, government actions which, in the minds of a majority of Americans have been prompted by such a threat have invariably met with approval. At the same time, the American, people have consistently required prior notification regarding governmental actions undertaken to defend the nation, as well as questioning undesirable means employed in pursuit of an otherwise acceptable end.

Tom Clancy’s latest novel is an admirable attempt to demonstrate what might be the result if an American administration, in response to an apparent public perception that the illegal importation of illicit drugs constitutes a clear and present danger, resolved to employ the armed forces of the country to limit the operations of the Colombian drug barons. Unfortunately, in Clancy’s scenario this operation is launched without the knowledge of the nation’s elected representatives in Congress, and the methods employed are questionable.

CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER is a gripping tale of suspense which holds the reader in its grasp until the last page. It is filled with those technological details which characterize Clancy’s work, and presents a cast of characters who leap from the page in the thoroughly realistic manner which his fans have learned to expect. At the same time, Clancy reveals both the potential and the limitations associated with the use of conventional military forces in such a circumstance. This work is especially timely in the light of recent events in Colombia, and it is to be hoped that its essential message does not go unheeded by this or any future American administration in Washington.

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