



President George W. Bush signs the Patriot Act on October 26, 2001.

Two decades ago, soon after September 11, 2001, photographs of George W. Bush, clearly showing grazes on his left cheek and a small cut on his lower lip, appeared in the media. It looked as though someone had thrown a shoe at him. But this was apparently not the case, either then or at any time thereafter. The president had choked on a pretzel while watching television, and this had irritated his vagus nerve, which then signalled to his heart to reduce its rate, and this led to him fainting and falling...

In the midst of the greatest crisis his country had faced since the Second World War, the most heavily guarded man in the world was nearly killed by a pretzel. This happened out of sight of his security team. In an instant a tiny piece of bread highlighted the gaps in every system of defence, and then all of that was forgotten again, because one cannot plan for risks like these. The pretzel file is closed, as an acceptable loss of control. Period.

Thus, this incident had no consequences, and life went on as usual. The war on terror and its total surveillance package, the USA Patriot Act, was implemented. The need to completely control all imaginable areas of the social fabric could even be seen as a cynical lesson learned from the pretzel incident.