

Humans, especially ones with large amounts of power, have always overstepped their boundaries. That is not something that we, as a species, can change. There are, however, things we can do to limit powerful people from overstepping their bounds. One good idea on how to do this was originally developed by the Roman Republic. This is known to us now as the separation of powers, the idea that there are multiple branches of the government and they can each limit each other's power. Here in the U.S we have the Judiciary, Executive and Legislative branches. Between these three, there have been many instances of one taking advantage of their power, and the others keeping that one in balance.

One somewhat topical example would be the Iran-Contra Affair under the Reagan Administration. First however, some context is necessary. Under the Reagan administration, there was a very strict policy on communism, especially so in the western hemisphere. This meant that the Cuban backed Sandinista regime in Nicaragua was a force to be destroyed. The Contras were an anticommunist paramilitary force who Reagan called, "A moral equivalent to our founding fathers". The general populace and the Legislative Branch of the U.S did not agree to this and banned any U.S funding to the group. Reagan did not want to back down this easy. He would tell his national security advisor, "I want you to do whatever you have to do to help these people keep body and soul together." This culminated in the selling of arms to Iran, against the rules of a previously enacted arms embargo against Iran. Of the 30,000,000 dollars the Iranians paid, only 12 million was found in the hands of the U.S government. General Oliver North would explain this with the fact that the rest was used for the funding and training of the Contras in Nicaragua.

But what would be done to balance the power of the Executive Branch? The Judicial Branch would conduct hearings and prosecutions for higher ups involved in the scandal and make sure something like it would never happen again. People like Caspar Weinberger, (Secretary of Defense at the time) and Robert C. McFarlane, (National Security Advisor at the time) would be indicted for their parts in the scandal. There would be much investigation into the ordeal and the Executive Branch's suspiciously gained power would be dissolved. Even though many of the indicted people would be pardoned by president George H. W Bush, the Executive Branch would never try to exceed the power given to them by the constitution in such away again. The balance would then become restored between the branches of government with the executive branch kept in check.

If one section of the government were permitted to run free, with no ability to be kept in check, it would likely give up on the idea of representing the populace, as it is supposed to in a Federal Republic. This section of government might see free speech as a threat to their power, and they would merely sign into act a law oppressing the free speech of individuals. If power is heavily concentrated towards one branch, they may take advantage of their power by taking away one of the key rights of American citizens. With a separation of powers, a congressman might propose that law, and it might get voted in by fellow congressmen. But then, it has to go through the Judiciary Branch, who decides whether or not the law is constitutional. For purposes of demonstration, let's say that by some miracle, the Judiciary Branch finds a law like that constitutional, and does not veto it. It then has to go into the Executive Branch, where the president either vetoes the law or approves it. That is a three layered failsafe on making sure that no branch of government exceeds their power and infringes the rights of U.S citizens. Though in theory an

unconstitutional law could be passed, it would be extremely difficult and in the time it would take for one to be passed, the citizens of the U.S would likely be able to stop such a thing from happening.

The idea of the separation of powers is an ancient, yet a still useful one. The Roman Republic fell because they were unable to keep the power of their executive branch in check. Maintaining a balance of power between the branches of government is paramount to the survival of a free people. If the power becomes concentrated in the hands of one branch, as it did in the Iran-Contra affair, it will mean the government doing unconstitutional things as they did in that instance, but on a long-term scale. The Iran-Contra Affair was able to be quelled rather quickly, making sure the Executive Branch did not overstep their bounds in ways more than they already did in that instance. If a branch of government becomes all powerful in the long term, because we as a people neglect the separation of powers, future generations will read in textbooks of "The Fall of the United States Republic".

-Luke O'Brien