

Decades in the Making: The U.S. Police State

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[War is a crime](#) 1 February 2011

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#)

Andrew Kolin's new book "State Power and Democracy: Before and During the Presidency of George W. Bush" actually begins with the war for independence and continues into the Obama years. A 231-page monotone recounting of endless facts, it doesn't pick up with Bush the Lesser until page 137. Kolin chronicles a gradual slide into an imperial presidency that really got going after World War II. Along the way he chronicles the damage done to the forces of resistance, making a compelling case that our movements for peace and justice are weak in part because of the extreme repression of recent decades.

Kolin's second chapter takes us through the early twentieth century, chapter three from Truman to LBJ, chapter four Nixon to Bush the Older, chapter five Clinton and Chimp, chapters six and seven all Dubya, and chapter eight Captain Peace Prize. Only without the cutesy names (that's me) and without much commentary, analysis, outline, or subheadings. "State Power and Democracy" is like an unrelenting stream-of-consciousness recounting of general trends and, in large part, specific detailed events of the past 60 years. It is thus an excellent reference book, as soon as you figure out where to find things.

Kolin's book is also an excellent corrective, that he himself seems to somewhat miss in his closing paragraphs, to the notion that partisan politics can reverse the movement toward a police state. Kolin says we've arrived at a police state but recognizes, I think, that we can still go further down this path. He recommends, however, that we try to work with the Democratic Party. More valuable perhaps than that bit of advice tacked onto the end of the book is the history Kolin tells of the two-steps-forward-and-a-half-a-step-back progress decade after decade, as Democratic and Republican presidents alike have seized ever greater police state powers. Had this happened under a single political party, the primary difference would probably not have been the increased speed in the fascist advance but the increased awareness and resistance among Americans.

When we get beyond the idea that George W. Bush ruined a perfect republic, and read a fuller account, like Kolin's, of what's gone wrong, it becomes evident that Bush could never have done what he did without Clinton's efforts to expand war and police powers, including the power of rendition. Similarly, Clinton could never have gone down that path without Reagan, or Reagan without Nixon, or Nixon without LBJ, or any of them without Truman, who would have been lost without the already huge accumulation of power in the White House and the abusive precedents of Abraham Lincoln and those who went before. It appears, as many of us warned in 2008, that what Kolin writes in this passage will determine our fate:

"The ultimate measure of whether or not the Obama administration will roll back the police state will depend on whether or not there are prosecutions of Bush administration officials. Past history says this isn't likely; whether it was enslavement of African Americans;

ethnocidal policies against American Indians; or the consistent, sometimes violent repression of dissent, government has generally not been held accountable. While Nixon left office and a few of Watergate's perpetrators were punished, the institutional arrangements involving the FBI and CIA that made Watergate possible remained. The imperial presidency was slowed but not halted. When the Iran-Contra conspirators violated the Constitution, President Bush senior pardoned them."

The grammatical construction of the first sentence above should give us a bit of hope: "whether or not there are prosecutions" — because there may be prosecutions of top Bush officials in Spain, and it will be up to us to communicate to the people and the courts of Spain our deep gratitude and our willingness to take the lesson to heart. Such reversals should, after all, come more easily in Washington if the people of Egypt are able, in the coming days, to remove and — ideally — prosecute the dictator of their country who has had the full support of the past seven presidents of ours.

For an excerpt of Kolin's book go here:
<http://www.juancole.com/2011/01/kolin-how-the-us-became-a-police-state.html>

David Swanson is the author of "War Is A Lie." See <http://warisalie.org>

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