

Has America become Fascist?

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If it hasn't gone the way of Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany, it sure is teetering on the brink. America is a nation in deepening crisis, a nation whose leaders repeatedly plunge their citizens into, and make them pay for, serial wars abroad, while stealing their liberties at home. USA has become a country that trashes its citizens (New Orleans), tortures its enemies (Abu Ghraib), threatens other nations with nuclear fire (Iran), flouts international treaties (UN Charter re Iraq), and spies on (FISA), and intimidates, its critics (No Fly). Americans that can clearly see the totalitarian machinations of Vladimir Putin in Russia and Hu Jintao in China are blind to the fascism threatening to envelop them as well.

Webster's defines fascism as "a totalitarian governmental system led by a dictator and emphasizing an aggressive nationalism, militarism, and often racism." A comparison of 20th century fascist and communist regimes with President Bush's USA indicates the machinery for a full-blown totalitarian takeover is now in place, even if no coup has occurred. As Naomi Wolf writes in "The End of America" (Chelsea Green) the 2007 Defense Authorization Bill's Section 333 allows the president "to declare martial law and take charge of the National Guard troops without the permission of a governor when 'public order' has been lost..." and to "send the guard into our streets during a public health emergency, terrorist attack or 'other condition.'"

The enabling crowbar was the Military Commissions Act of 2006. It gives the president authority to set up his own system for bringing alien combatants to trial while denying them protection of the Geneva Conventions. "The president and his lawyers now claim the authority to designate any American citizen he chooses as being an 'enemy combatant,'" Wolf writes of power usurpation that characterized the post-World War One epoch in Europe and Asia.

Thus, Congress has empowered Bush just as Germany's Reichstag empowered Hitler, Wolf writes, recalling Hitler's boast, "Democracy will be overthrown with the tools of democracy." Hitler's Interior Minister issued Clause 2 that gave police the power to hold people in custody indefinitely and without a court order, powers the U.S. Congress today has conferred upon "The Decider" in the White House. Mussolini's used the less grandiose "Il Duce" or "The Leader."

According to Michael Ratner, director of the Center For Constitutional Rights, New York, "the president can...designate people enemy combatants and detain them for whatever reason he wants...there are no charges and prisoners have no lawyers, no family visits, no court reviews, no rights to anything, and no right to release until the mythical end to the 'war on terror.'"

Wolf writes that dictators justify their usurpation of domestic liberties by raising the alarm of

“terrorist” threats. Stalin, for example, used this very term in 1934 when he warned his public of a world-wide conspiracy by capitalists to overthrow the Soviet state. If there have been no mass arrests of native-born Americans it is only because the president has not chosen to exercise this authority. If you think it can’t happen to you, recall that in September of 2003 the Army arrested 36-year-old American-born Muslim chaplain James Yee, a West Point graduate, allegedly for “espionage and possibly treason”—but more likely for calling for better conditions for Gitmo inmates. Wolf wrote:

“He was blindfolded; his ears were blocked; he was manacled and then put into solitary confinement for 76 days; forbidden mail, television, or anything to read except the Koran. His family was not allowed to visit him. ...His lawyers were told he would face execution. (But) Within six months, the U.S. government had dropped all criminal charges against Yee.” Yes, just as it has dropped charges against hundreds of Guantanamo prisoners earlier, men labeled by former Defense Secretary Rumsfeld as “the worst of the worst” but against the overwhelming majority of whom the Bush regime apparently had no case whatever!

The treatment Yee got is typical of those who run afoul of the Bush regime: torture first, trial after...if there is a trial. And since his release, Yee has been denied his free speech right to discuss his ordeal—gagged by the Pentagon. Perhaps most incredible, even if a Guantanamo prisoner should be found innocent, the Pentagon says he might not be released anyway. This echoes Stalin’s practice of re-arresting Gulag prisoners after they had done their time. At one point, Stalin had eight million souls behind bars, even exceeding President Bush, currently the world’s Incarcerator-In-Chief.

Author Wolf says another danger flag is the creation of paramilitary groups, “aggressive men who have no clear, accountable relationship to the government or the party seeking power...” Mussolini had the blackshirts; Hitler the brownshirts; but whatever their dress, they were thugs. Wolf says that Moycock, N.C.-based Blackwater Worldwide stands ready “to deploy its unaccountable private army (35,000 men) in the U.S.—in the aftermath of natural disasters, and also in cases of ‘national emergency.’” With at least a half billion dollars in government contracts, “Blackwater is the world’s largest private security force, works closely with Halliburton, and is available for action outside the scrutiny of Congress,” Wolf writes. The outfit raked in \$73 million for patrolling the streets of New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. And Blackwater subcontractor Red Tactica, recruits former Chilean commandos,” men described by one Chilean sociologist that are “valued for their expertise in kidnapping, torturing and killing defenseless civilians,” Wolf wrote.

Besides creating such “security” forces, dictators create secret prisons, as Bush has done, ranging from prison ships in the Indian Ocean to dungeons in Poland, where they can hide them from Red Cross scrutiny, as the CIA has done. “We should worry about the men held at Guantanamo because history shows that stripping prisoners of their rights is intoxicating not only to leaders but to functionaries at every level of society,” Wolf writes. “Gitmo” is also an interrogation camp, an operation “that is completely and flatly illegal” and outlawed by the Geneva Conventions in 1949, she points out. Stalin also employed torture and in 1937 actually legalized its use in Soviet prisons. When he received his infamous “albums” with the names of those to be executed and imprisoned, next to some names he often wrote: “Beat! Beat! Beat!” And only months after taking power, Hitler “established a network of illegitimate prisons where torture took place” and where guards could murder inmates with “no chance of being punished,” Wolf said. And like Stalin, The Decider has signaled his henchmen beatings are now the American Way.

Dictators hold power by instilling fear in their citizens. Since 2000, Wolf writes there has been “a sharp increase in U.S. citizen groups that are being harassed and infiltrated by police and federal agents, often in illegal ways.” She pointed to a 2006 ACLU report that California police had infiltrated antiwar protests, political rallies, and other constitutionally protected gatherings and were secretly investigating them, even though the California state constitution forbids this. And prior to the 2004 Republican convention in New York, police department detectives infiltrated groups planning peaceful demonstrations. At the Federal level, Bush’s apparatchiks are compiling dossiers on law-abiding citizens. The Defense Department’s Talon program has created a database about peaceful antiwar and other groups and activists. As Jen Nessel of the Center for Constitutional Rights says, “We have absolutely moved over into a preventive detention model—you look like you could do something bad, you might do something bad, so we’re going to hold you.”

Bush regime actions’ today recall how the Gestapo, NKVD, Stasi (East German secret police) and Red China’s Politburo “all requisitioned private data such as medical, banking, and library records,” Wolf writes, because access to such private data “breaks down citizens’ sense of being able to act freely against those in power.” And although the Department of Homeland Security’s TIPS scheme to get letter carriers and meter readers, etc., to report suspicious activities was met with derision and never funded, the ACLU noted it was merely absorbed in the Pentagon’s “black budget.”

Privacy in America today as guaranteed by the Constitution is fast becoming a memory. The New York Times reported the government in 2005 was monitoring your e-mail and telephone talk without legal warrants and the following year the newspaper disclosed U.S. treasury officials, with CIA help, “were reviewing millions of private bank transactions without individual court-ordered warrants or subpoenas,” Wolf pointed out.

One method of intimidation is to limit a citizen’s right to travel freely. The Bush regime has created “watch”(75,000 names) and “no fly”(45,000 names) lists that restrict individuals’ air travel—and those searched and/or stopped from flying can complain all they like because it won’t do them any good. Robert Johnson, an American citizen, Wolf reports, described the humiliation factor of being strip searched when he attempted to board an airplane: “I had to take off my pants. I had to take off my sneakers, then I had to take off my socks. I was treated like a criminal.” This has now become a commonplace ordeal for thousands of Americans. Even at the height of World War Two, such invasions of personal rights would have been unthinkable.

Going back to Webster’s definition of fascism, USA today is the world’s runaway leader in “militarism.” Forty-three percent of all U.S. tax dollars in 2007 went to feed the war machine, as the Pentagon believes security depends on operating more than 700 military bases in 130 countries overseas in addition to 1,000 at home. Bush has escalated its budget so that USA now spends nearly as much on arms as all the rest of the world combined. Uncle Sam is also the No. 1 private arms peddler to the world. By contrast, Iran, portrayed by the White House as a menace to the Middle East, has an annual military budget that is 1/100th of the Pentagon’s outlay.

Perhaps it would be a good exercise for Americans to read how Hitler emphasized nationalism and militarism. As he wrote in “Mein Kampf”: “Instead of everlasting struggle the world preaches cowardly pacifism, and everlasting peace...There is only one right in this world and this right is one’s own strength.” As for “reconciliation, understanding, world peace, the League of Nations, and international solidarity—we destroy these ideas.” Hitler

called for delivering Germans “from the hopeless confusion of international convictions” and educating them “consciously and systematically to fanatical nationalism.” Armed with such views the fascist state thinks nothing of starting an aggressive war based on lies. In 1939, Hitler claimed he was attacked by Poland, igniting World War Two. Bush claimed that Iraq had nuclear and biological weapons to destroy America when, in fact, it was the United States that possessed those very weapons and it was Iraq that had none.

Bush nonetheless started a seemingly endless war that has by some estimates to date killed more than 1 million Iraqis, wounded perhaps 2 million more, forced a like number from their homes, ravished their country and its economy, touched off a civil war, forced 1 million Iraqis into foreign exile, and killed and wounded 35,000 American troops. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the Iraq war “illegal” but Bush, like Hitler, cares nothing for international treaties, even if those the U.S. has signed under our Constitution are the supreme law of the land. He has made a mockery to the anti-nuclear treaty, causing former President Carter to charge his own country has become the leader in nuclear proliferation. What’s more, Bush has spent about \$50 billion on germ warfare “defense” with no known significant foreign threat to USA.

Americans may think that Webster’s view that fascism is often accompanied by racism doesn’t fit them. Indeed, USA’s strides to eliminate racism based on color in the last century are a societal marvel. But racism against African Americans has largely been replaced with the foolhardy notion that Americans are better than everybody else in the world and have the authority to set right any ruler they believe is in error. This view of their own superiority echoes Hitler’s “master race” view of the German people or the Tokyo militarists’ view in 1940 that a superior Japan was destined to rule “the eight corners of the world.” In this sense, America is very “racist” indeed and the “aggressive nationalism” highlighted by Webster’s is apparent in the rhetoric of its public officials and the conduct of its foreign affairs.

Yet another characteristic of the fascist state is its leader’s use of arbitrary power. Note how Bush evades the will of Congress by tacking on “signing statements” to laws he doesn’t like, thus refusing to enforce them, putting himself above the will of Congress and the American people. Note how his aides refuse to respond to Congressional subpoenas to testify. Yet another example is how the Justice Department’s own internal investigators found Bush’s appointees filled nonpolitical posts with party hacks and then lied about what they had done. “Civil Service Laws Were Breached in Filling Nonpolitical Jobs” said a New York Times reported July 29th. It should be remembered Hitler followed a like policy when he purged Jews from their government posts. When tyrants rule, merit is ever subservient to loyalty.

Of course, Bush has not flung thousands of Americans into prison to torture and murder them as Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin did, but he has the power to do so, making the latter half of 2008 a time of danger for Americans. Wolf writes, “At a point in both Mussolini’s and Hitler’s takeovers, citizens witnessed a stunning series of quickly escalating pronunciamientos or faits accomplis. After each leader made his bids for power beyond what the Italian parliament and the German Reichstag allowed him, each abruptly started to claim all kinds of new rights that were extra-parliamentary; the right unilaterally to go to war, to annex territory, to veto existing laws, or to overrule the judiciary,” etc.

To repeat the question, “Is America fascist?” the answer is that the machinery is in place for a totalitarian takeover at the direction of a tyrant. While it is true that the U.S. is not a one-party state (some will dispute this owing to the many similarities of the two major parties)

like fascist Italy and Germany, and it does have free elections, for the first time in its history in 2000 and 2004 an ominous cloud of doubt has hung over the authenticity of the popular vote and a vast segment of the voting public today does not trust the election machinery to record their vote as they intend. There are no mass arrests and executions in the thousands and millions that typified the regimes of Hitler and Stalin (Stalin had 681,000 people executed in 1937-8 "Great Terror" alone); free speech still exists (under Stalin, a person could be imprisoned for making a Stalin joke); and the government has not put its leaden hand on business as Putin has done although crony capitalism in the selection of defense contractors is rampant. These vital distinctions set America apart from the totalitarian society. Yet, with each passing day in its "War on Terror" the Bush regime tightens its hold on the machinery to establish totalitarian rule here.

Americans need to keep in mind that worse than anything President Bush has inflicted upon its own citizenry is what its wars of aggression have inflicted on innocent humanity abroad. A million dead Iraqis can't give a damn by what terminology you describe the United States. If the American people allow their government to make criminal wars to deprive innocent foreigners of their lives and liberties they do not deserve to enjoy either at home.

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