

The Orwellian Paradigm: Killing You for Your Own Safety

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Global Research, April 15, 2013
antiwar.com

Theme: [Police State & Civil Rights](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

*Almost thirty years ago, cultural critic Neil Postman argued in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* that television's gradual replacement of the printing press has created a dumbed-down culture driven by mindless entertainment.*

*In this context, Postman claimed that Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* correctly foresaw our dystopian future, as opposed to George Orwell's *1984*. Contrary to Postman's critique, however, the principles of Newspeak and doublethink dominate modern political discourse.*

Their widespread use is a testament to Orwell's profound insight into how language can be manipulated to restrict human thought.



WAR IS PEACE

Formulating the Language of Perpetual War – From AUMF to “Associates of Associates.”

The semantic deception began shortly after September 11, 2001. “Our war on terror begins with al Qaeda,” Bush said in his State of the Union address, “*but it does not end there*. It will

not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated (emphasis added)."

The defining feature of this rhetoric is that it declares war on a particular method of violence used by disaffected states or groups. In fact, the phrase "war on terror" functions as what semiotics calls a [floating signifier](#), a term devoid of any real meaning and thus open to any interpretation.

Terrorism has no shape, mass, or boundary; it is an abstraction, a tactic of asymmetrical warfare used to achieve political goals. Imagine if Franklin D. Roosevelt had declared "war on surprise attacks" in the wake Pearl Harbor, or if Lyndon Johnson had vowed to defeat guerilla warfare in Vietnam. This linguistic construct, therefore, ensures an open-ended conflict with no conceivable end.

Unperturbed by this paradox, British Prime Minister [Tony Blair](#) dutifully reiterated that, "the fact is we are at war with terrorism." But the bombing sorties over Afghanistan had barely begun when the label morphed into "The Long War," and then the "decisive ideological struggle of the 21st century and the calling of our generation." And now, the targeted killings program has been "[extended to militant groups](#)" with no connection to September 11, 2001 - that is, "associates of associates." Removing the requirement for any linkage to al-Qaeda gives the government unfettered discretion to assassinate anyone without due process of law.

This phraseology makes it impossible to distinguish the dialectical concepts of war and peace. It makes peace synonymous with a state of warfare. Peace is defined in terms of a generational commitment to war and, in turn, war is framed as a necessity to keep the peace. In other words, War is Peace.

This is the lexicon of perpetual war, the vocabulary of a conflict that is never meant to end. "You can't end the war," as one official admits to the Washington Post, "if you keep adding people to the enemy who are not actually part of the original enemy."

Aggression is Self-Defense -Waging Full Scale War to Prevent War.

Operation Iraqi Freedom represented phase two in a linguistic framework meant to fuse two diametrically opposite concepts in the public mind: preemption and prevention.

The purpose of preemptive war is to thwart or neutralize an imminent attack - one that is "[instant](#), overwhelming, and leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation" - without absorbing the first blow. Conversely, preventive war is pure aggression - it is not tied to any notion of imminence and is primarily directed at securing some strategic advantage. Thus, the [dimension of time](#) is the primary difference between the former and the latter.

The Bush Doctrine blurred the lines between preventive and preemptive wars. It represented a seismic shift in national security strategy from one dominated by the Cold War doctrines of deterrence and containment, to one that now enshrined preventive war as a permanent feature of US policy. During his 2002 commencement speech at West Point, Bush stated:

"If we *wait for threats to fully materialize* we will have waited too long...Yet the war on terror will not be won on the defensive. We must take the battle to the enemy, disrupt his plans

and confront the worst threats *before they emerge...*" (emphasis added)."

Furthermore, the 2006 US National Security Strategy Paper states that "If necessary, however, under long-standing principles of self-defense, we do not rule out the use of force *before attacks occur, even if uncertainty remains as to the time and place of the enemy's attack*" (emphasis added). In true Newspeak fashion, such a conception of "preemptive action" inverts the traditional model of self-defense under [customary international law](#) by rendering imminence completely irrelevant. In doing so, it strips self-defense of any practical meaning. It conflates preventive war with preemptive war; it packages aggression as self-defense.

But as Cheney's [one-percent doctrine](#) later revealed, the threat need not even be likely, let alone imminent, for self-defense (read aggression) to apply. According to this logic, even a one percent chance of an event occurring is sufficient to treat it as a certainty. "*It's not about our analysis,*" Cheney reportedly said, "*...It's about our response* (emphasis added)." Put simply, the likelihood of an event occurring is not a necessary prerequisite to wage war. This embeds the [supreme international crime](#) of aggressive war in the fabric of national security policy. Aggression is self-defense, Winston.

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

The Obama Administration gave the War on Terror a facelift by rebranding it "Overseas Contingency Operations." But the sanitizing nomenclature has done little to halt the [institutionalization](#) of the apparatus of tyranny- from Kill Lists to Disposition Matrices to Drone Playbooks to indefinite detentions to persecuting whistleblowers to pervasive domestic surveillance. These developments are strikingly at odds with the post-9/11 metanarrative that frames this conflict as a clash between the forces of freedom and despotism. As Bush phrased it:

"Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this Chamber, a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other."

From this point onward, spreading 'freedom and democracy' abroad became the rallying point for a nation enraptured by its new messianic role. But it soon became apparent that freedom at home cannot coexist with hyper-militarism abroad.

Accusation Is Guilt – Killing You for Your Own Safety.

What could be more destructive to the cherished freedoms that make America a "shining city on a hill" than giving a "[high level official](#)" the power to kill Americans on [US soil](#) without any due process, accountability or transparency? What could be more Orwellian than asserting such dictatorial authority, which has always been the hallmark of totalitarian states, in the name of protecting the public's safety? The cost of war is not measured solely in terms of blood and treasure. War also corrodes human morality to a point where even the most inhumane acts become perfectly acceptable. In fact, summary executions without due process and the right to a fair trial served as one of the justifications for removing Saddam Hussein's regime.

Not only does the recent Department of Justice White Paper resoundingly affirm this power

grab, it also destroys the foundation of Anglo-American jurisprudence by nullifying the principle of ‘innocent until proven guilty.’ It eviscerates the Fifth Amendment, which prohibits any deprivation of “life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.” It obliterates the protections afforded by the Sixth Amendment, including the “right to a speedy and public trial,” by asserting that government allegations alone, based on secret evidence, are sufficient to establish guilt. Accusation is guilt, Winston. As Glenn Greenwald cogently [observes](#):

“But of course, when this memo refers to “a Senior Operational Leader of al-Qaida”, what it actually means is this: someone whom the President – in total secrecy and with no due process – has accused of being that. Indeed, the memo itself makes this clear, as it baldly states that presidential assassinations are justified when “an informed, high-level official of the US government has determined that the targeted individual poses an imminent threat of violent attack against the US.

This is the crucial point: the memo isn’t justifying the due-process-free execution of senior al-Qaida leaders who pose an imminent threat to the US. It is justifying the due-process-free execution of people secretly accused by the president and his underlings, with no due process, of being that (emphasis in original).”

Rarely do apologists for the normalization of extra-judicial murder realize that this represents a permanent erosion of core liberties, an ever-lasting debasement of the Bill of Rights. “We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it,” Orwell said. “Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power.” Secret assassinations are here to stay.

The Great Shift Inward — From Enemy Combatants to Homegrown Terrorists.

Under international law, captured enemy soldiers are considered Prisoners of War (POWs), and thus shielded by the Geneva Conventions and the [jus cogens](#) prohibition against torture. Furthermore, terrorism was traditionally treated as a federal criminal offense before 9/11. Accordingly, those accused of terrorism could still invoke the protections of the Bill of Rights, including the right to counsel, right to a jury trial, right to confront one’s accusers, right against self-incrimination and conviction based on guilt proven beyond a reasonable doubt.

As the 2002 [Padilla Case](#) demonstrated, however, the enemy combatant doctrine creates a category of detainees that are neither POWs nor terrorists. As such, they are beyond the reach of both the Bill of Rights and Geneva Conventions. This undefined label essentially circumvents the safeguards of the legal system and allows the state to treat the accused like a medieval King would a serf. It sets the groundwork for a parallel gulag system in the United States operating on the model of indefinite detention without charge or trial, no access to a lawyer, and confessions obtained through torture.

And then came Attorney General Holder’s recent premonition about a new threat: the “homegrown terrorist.” [Speaking to ABC news](#), Holder’s statement signals a decisive shift in the script governing the ongoing campaign:

“It’s a very serious threat. I think what it says is that the scope, our scope, has

to be broadened. We can't think that it's just a bunch of people in caves in some part of the world. We have to be concerned about the homeland to the same extent that we are worried about the threat coming from overseas" (emphasis added).

The implications of this statement are staggering, for it turns the United States into the new "[battlefield](#)." Systems of tyranny perfected abroad are always turned inward. It only took a decade for the same tactics of warfare that were previously restricted to foreign countries to now being applied domestically.

Responding to Senator Rand Paul's question whether the President can authorize drone strikes on US citizens on domestic soil, [Holder revealingly states](#) that "It is possible...to imagine an extraordinary circumstance in which it would be necessary and appropriate under the Constitution and applicable laws of the United States for the President to authorize the military to use lethal force within the territory of the United States." Even though the [Posse Comitatus Act of 1878](#) generally prohibits military involvement in domestic law enforcement, notice how Holder sees no problem with the military, not police, using lethal force against Americans on US soil.

Furthermore, when combined with the DOJ White Paper's assertion that drone assassinations do "not require that the US have clear evidence that a specific attack . . . will take place in the immediate future," it becomes frighteningly clear that an anonymous "high level official" can deploy these "faceless ambassadors of death" to strike you dead anytime, even absent any imminent or likely threat. This gives government the power of God. It repudiates every principle of liberty this constitutional republic was founded upon.

This is no exaggeration, as Holder's follow-up response to Senator Paul clarifies: "Does the President have the authority to use a *weaponized drone* to kill an American *not engaged in combat* on American soil? The answer to that question is no (emphasis added)." As any lawyer can attest, Holder's heavily qualified statement creates more ambiguity.

Note the following points: (1) Holder is not saying that the President cannot kill an American on US soil. The phrasing of his question is much narrower, which can arguably be interpreted as allowing the President to kill without using "weaponized drones;" (2) most important of all, his statement implies that the President *does* have the authority to kill Americans "engaged in combat."

Hence, the issue of how "[combat](#)" is defined carries great importance. In this regard, William Grigg brilliantly points out that al-Awlaki's assassination sets a precedent that stretches the interpretation of "combat" to a point where there are few, if any, restraints on the Presidents power to kill:

"Combat" can consist of expressing support for Muslims mounting armed resistance against U.S. military aggression, which was the supposed crime committed by Anwar al-Awlaki, or sharing the surname and DNA of a known enemy of the state, which was the offense committed by Awlaki's 16-year-old son, Abdel. Under the rules of engagement used by the Obama Regime in Pakistan, Yemen, and Afghanistan, any "military-age" male found within a targeted "kill zone" is likewise designated a "combatant," albeit usually after the fact."

More than half a century ago Orwell had warned us that the scourge of war eventually turns inward. “The war is waged by each ruling group *against its own subjects*, and the object of the war is not to make or prevent conquests of territory, *but to keep the structure of society intact*. The very word “war”, therefore, has become misleading” (emphasis added). Stated differently, war becomes a buzzword for concealing a rather insidious internal dynamic, one that treats those who oppose the status quo – the intrepid whistleblower, the outspoken journalist, the vocal activist – as a legitimate target for persecution.

Dissent Is Treason.

It is precisely the ability to express unpopular opinions and the autonomy to diverge from convention without fear of persecution that makes any society free. As Edward R. Murrow reminded us during the McCarthy era, dissent should never be confused with disloyalty because “we are not descended from fearful men [...] who feared to write, to speak, to associate, and to defend causes that were, for the moment, unpopular.” That same principle holds true today, regardless of the nature of the claimed emergency.

Bradley Manning was [caged](#) like an animal under insanity inducing conditions for more than [two and a half years](#) without trial. Manning’s treatment is an epiphenomenon of the current administration’s unprecedented [war against whistleblowers](#), which makes an example of any lowly prole who dare expose corruption at the highest levels of the Inner Party. John Kiriakou rots in prison for the “crime” of informing the people about the CIA’s illegal waterboarding, whereas John Brennan ascends to the heights of power for endorsing torture and assassinations. The operative effect of such incidents is to create a culture of intimidation and silence by making it a “thoughtcrime” to deviate from the official version of events.

Investigative journalist [Chris Hedges](#) points out that the NDAA (the Homeland Battlefield Bill) “permits the military to detain anyone, including U.S. citizens, who ‘substantially support’—an undefined legal term—al-Qaida, the Taliban or ‘associated forces,’ again a term that is legally undefined.” This represents a clear step toward the [criminalization of activities](#) that were formerly protected under the First Amendment. It equates any meaningful dissent with treason.

As if this weren’t bad enough, some government employees are told to view [“protests” as a form of “low-level terrorism,”](#) and consider [“Fury at the West for reasons ranging from personal problems to global policies of the U.S.”](#) as a potential indicator of terrorist activity.

Recall that the PATRIOT Act was also billed a necessary counterterrorism tool. Even though it vastly expanded the state’s investigative power without any attendant checks and balances, Congress was given no time to read it due to the claimed exigency of the circumstances. Almost a decade later, however, its application has been expanded to ordinary, [non-terrorism cases](#) like drug dealing and child pornography.

Understanding how this process works is vital, for tyranny always treads a familiar path: first it clamors for unfettered authority to resolve some overriding problem; then it consolidates that power; next it gradually expands its vocabulary and application; finally, it turns around and uses that power to persecute everyone. Indeed, those who wield unrestrained power will inevitably abuse it.

Big Brother Is Watching You – Argus, TrapWire, Stingray, EARS and Total Information

Awareness.

Reporting on DARPA's most recent project called Effective Affordable Reusable Speech-to-text (EARS), [Wired magazine](#) reports that "Darpa wants to make systems so accurate, you'll be able to easily record, transcribe and recall all the conversations you ever have." It's a "little freaky," the author admits, since it gives those who wield this technology total omniscience – the power to know everything about everyone at any time.

The parallels to 1984 are obvious: "Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you. Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed — no escape. *Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull*(emphasis added)." The only vestige of privacy is in one's own mind – for now at least.

But even though the average citizen's privacy has been eviscerated, the government continues to operate at unprecedented levels of secrecy. As the [Associated Press](#) reports:

...the government cited national security to withhold information at least 5,223 times — a jump over 4,243 such cases in 2011 and 3,805 cases in Obama's first year in office. The secretive CIA last year became even more secretive: Nearly 60 percent of 3,586 requests for files were withheld or censored for that reason last year, compared with 49 percent a year earlier.

In that context, privacy is not dead per se; it is flourishing insofar as the government's inner workings are concerned.

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH.

"They could be made to accept the most flagrant violations of reality...and were *not sufficiently interested in public events to notice what was happening*. By lack of understanding they remained sane. They simply swallowed everything..."

Like Orwell's Ministry of Truth, the opinion molders – the [handful of corporations that control the flow of information](#) – sanitize reality to cover for even the worst cases of executive wrongdoing. Their paternalism regards people as mere casual observers to be controlled, not stakeholders to be informed about the democratic process. Their function is to control the narrative of events, for "Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past."

Oceania Has Always Never Been At War With East Asia.

Orwell explained doublethink as "holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them...To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them, to forget any fact that has become inconvenient, and then, when it becomes necessary again, to draw it back from oblivion for just as long as it is needed..."

A [recently declassified memorandum](#) written by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2001, almost a year and a half before Operation Iraqi Freedom, adds to the plethora of evidence that Rumsfeld, along with the rest of the neoconservative war hawks, concocted false pretexts to market the invasion of Iraq. The same Donald Rumsfeld, who invoked Saddam Hussein's non-existent Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) as a casus belli to invade Iraq in 2003, previously armed the same Iraqi dictator with chemical and biological

weapons as [Ronald Reagans Middle East envoy](#) during the 1980s. Oceania was *never* at war with East Asia.

But this was an inconvenient fact in the prelude to Operation Iraqi Freedom, and therefore had to be forgotten. It never happened. "Everything faded into mist. The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth." Oceania has *always* been at war with East Asia.

Conclusion – The Grand Contradiction.

In a historical irony, Orwell's [proposed preface](#) to *Animal Farm* about censorship in the English press was suppressed and remained undiscovered for years after his death. In it, Orwell mounts a principled defense of intellectual freedom during a time when the western press brooked no criticism of Joseph Stalin or his murderous regime. "These people don't see that if you encourage totalitarian methods, the time may come when they will be used against you instead of for you," Orwell warned. "Make a habit of imprisoning Fascists without trial, and perhaps the process won't stop at Fascists." Make a habit of endorsing drone strikes in far off lands, and perhaps the next drone will show up in your neighborhood.

In conclusion, the grand contradiction lurking behind all the rhetorical smoke screens is simply this: in trying to rid the world of evil using the tactics of evil, we unleash even greater horrors; we become what we seek to destroy.

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