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Empire Abroad, Empire At Home

By Richard Moser
April 26, 2017

“For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”

Americans are taught to revel in our power and supremacy. Over 650 major military bases span the whole world. We wage endless wars. American corporations are the most powerful economic organizations in history. The fusion of economic and military power makes our empire unlike any the world has ever seen.

We may be “#1” but it is to this great empire that we have lost our souls and our democracy with it.[1]

The New Paradigm

No great wall separates U.S. foreign policy from domestic policy. The Manhattan Institute is an influential think tank founded in 1978 by William Casey, former head of all U.S. intelligence and Director of the CIA. In a 2006 report “Merging Law Enforcement and Counterterrorism Strategies,” they describe “The New Paradigm:”

We know too that globalization is a permanent fact. The international economy is the engine of our nation and the source of our wealth. It means that all the physical and conceptual walls associated with the modern, sovereign state—the walls that divide domestic from international,

the police from the military, intelligence from law enforcement, war from peace, and crime from war—are coming down.

The institutions and ideas U.S. elites used to project “full spectrum dominance” onto the global stage have eventually become part of the political order in the U.S. The “full spectrum” includes us.

It is empire — most of all — that dooms democracy and constitutional republics. As corporations have an insatiable drive for profit, empires have an insatiable drive for power. And that makes imperial actors hostile to the limits on authority, checks and balances, separation of powers and basic rights that the U.S. republic at least aspired to.

As the institutions of representative democracy become weaker and weaker — devoted only to serving the corporate power and global empire — the need for social control of the people becomes greater and greater.

Targeting Dissent in the USA

The “McCarthyism” of the 1950s was the first modern wave of coordinated social control. Truman stoked the fear and hatred of communism to serve foreign policy, but soon, in the hands of the FBI and unscrupulous politicians, it was turned against domestic dissent. The establishment decided that some ideas were so dangerous that American citizens did not have the right or capacity to think through them for themselves. The government would do the thinking for us.[2]

Dissent was equated with treason, and it was not until the hard fought battles of the civil rights movement that dissent was once again seen as legitimate. It’s worth remembering that Martin Luther King was widely accused of being a communist.

Starting in the mid-50s, the FBI’s COINTELPRO program attacked dissenters. While the civil rights and black power movements were the primary targets of violent repression, almost all social movements were surveilled and disrupted. Today, protestors face escalating penalties, police violence, surveillance, and intimidation. Particularly since Trump’s election there have been a host of proposed laws that aim to criminalize first amendment rights of free speech and assembly.

Nixon turned to the “War on Drugs” to create the domestic equivalent of war and suppress the political movements. The War on Drugs — waged by Democrats and Republicans alike — went after hippies, the young and the black community as a way of penalizing the populations on which the movements depended.

Now we know the outcome of the War on Drugs.

Over the past few decades the American people have created a vast militarized penal system that is now the most powerful institutionalized racism in the US. And like the forms of institutionalized racism that preceded it, the penal system functions as an effective form of social

control. Discriminatory and militarized policing, on-the-spot executions, slave-like prison labor, mass incarceration, school-to-prison pipeline, restriction of trial by jury, lengthy and mandatory sentencing, predatory fine, fee and debt traps, and its gigantic sweep and size constitutes nothing short of a preemptive war against the most potentially rebellious parts of the population: the young, people of color, the poor.[3]

Mandatory sentencing laws passed by Congress and signed by Bill Clinton shifted the power from judges to prosecutors. By tilting power away from the judiciary and toward the executive, a highly “efficient” system of incarceration took shape.

Police often get military training appropriate to an occupation force, training that emphasizing weapons rather than conflict resolution. The “oil cops” at Standing Rock were employees of a private firm with ties to Blackwater, the corporation that provided the mercenaries used by the US in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The use of facial recognition software, the recording and monitoring of electronic and phone communications and the commercialization of internet browsing data — all without consent or indictments — are part of the most sophisticated system of electronic surveillance ever created. Mass surveillance is a profound attack on the First Amendment. Knowing big brother is always listening chills free speech, dissent and free association.

The penal system chipped away other key provisions of the Bill of Rights including the protection from unwarranted search and seizure, the right to a trial, and the most fundamental rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

With 2 million behind bars, a million of which slave away for big corporations and the military, the penal system is the main example of how the empire’s increasing reliance on force and violence to solve political problems turned inward toward the American people.

But, as intimidating and brutal as the penal system is — it also a last resort. The use of force is evidence that the empire is losing control over the hearts and minds of increasing numbers of its subjects.

“Defense” on the Homefront

The line between empire abroad and empire at home was further eroded by provisions of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA).

The 1990 NDAA, passed by Congress and signed by President and former director of the CIA George Bush, allowed for the transfer of military weapons to domestic police forces accelerating the militarization of the penal system.

President Obama signed the 2012 NDAA which extended the rules of war worldwide — in effect making the US. homeland a theatre of war — by allowing indefinite detention without trial or justification, in violation of the constitutionally guaranteed right of Habeas Corpus.

The NDAA also included provisions that allowed the “US government to broadcast American produced foreign propaganda in the U.S.” And that is a lot of propaganda. In 2009, \$580 million was spend in Iraq and Afghanistan on the information war. Another \$500 million was spent by the Pentagon to produce fake Al-Qaeda videos. The NDAA essentially legalized the propaganda efforts of the CIA that were revealed as far back as 1975.

The first amendment is precise and sweeping: ‘Congress shall make *no law*...abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press...’ The Bill of Rights is designed to protect the people from the power of government not to protect government from the people.

In the last weeks of his term, Obama signed off on a bi-partisan effort to amend the 2016 NDAA and establish a “counter-propaganda” program, once again placing government in a position to determine what is propaganda and what is not. In a free country, that is the job of the people.

The chilling logic behind Obama’s record prosecution of whistleblowers under the Espionage Act and the Russian-baiting unleashed by the Clinton machine was taken to it’s extreme conclusion when Trump’s CIA director Mike Pompeo targeted Wikileaks as “a non-state, hostile intelligence service,” in a direct threat to free speech, free press and public access to information. Yet, in the last days of his term Obama insured that the 17 secret police forces would be able to freely share raw data and information gathered on millions of American citizens.

They can know all about us but we cannot know about them.

If the elites trusted the old forms of social order and enculturation— the media, educational system, family, military, church, or even the Constitution itself — to maintain order, would they need to create a system of mass surveillance, incarceration, and propaganda?

What a strange moment we live in!

The revolutionary vision of the Declaration of Independence, the checks on tyranny that structure the U.S. Constitution and the limits on government power listed in the Bill of Rights — though they be flawed and two and a half centuries old — are far more advanced than the form of government we now have. There is no democratic representation in the U.S. today The U.S. empire and the corporate power have done what the old British empire could not.

Only massive and disruptive social movements can unmask the abuses of power to truly test the limits of our rights. The most important question: how do we organize the social movements necessary to restore democracy?

Notes.

1/ See the work of The American Empire Project, “Empire, long considered an offense against America’s democratic heritage, now threatens to define the relationship between our country and the rest of the world. The American Empire Project publishes books that question this development, examine the origins of U.S. imperial aspirations, analyze their ramifications at

home and abroad, and discuss alternatives to this dangerous trend.” Also see Andrew Bacevich’s many articles and books such as *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*.

2/ Ellen Schrecker, *Many Are The Crimes: McCarthyism in America*

3/ <https://befreedom.co/2017/03/04/organize-the-white-working-class/>