
Tyranny Reverse Engineered

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LAURIE CALHOUN

Pacifists, who oppose the use of deadly force as a means of dispute resolution, have often been caricatured as laughably unrealistic. It seems a matter of common sense to many people that nonviolence is weaker, and therefore less effective, than violence. Bolstering the myth of military force as the only sure means to effect change, the story of World War II has been portrayed by the victors in such a way as to make it seem as though only the use of massive bombing and state-inflicted homicide could have stopped Hitler and the Nazis.

Gene Sharp is admired by many antiwar activists for having worked tirelessly to dispel the widely held misconceptions that nonviolence is purely passive and that violence can be defeated only through the use of yet more violence. Sharp's magnum opus, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, painstakingly documents episode after episode throughout history where dissenters did not wield violence but instead undertook nonviolent resistance, ultimately prevailing in conflicts against adversaries whose primary modus operandi was the use or threat of deadly force in securing their aims.¹ As Sharp observes, sincere supporters of the use of military force often point to the case of World War II as a success story, while ignoring not only effective uses of nonviolent action but also the long series of failed military misadventures,

Laurie Calhoun is senior fellow at the Libertarian Institute in Austin, Texas, and research fellow at the Independent Institute.

1. Originally published in 1973, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* comprises three parts: "Power and Struggle," "The Methods of Nonviolent Action," and "The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action."

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as though those failures had nothing to do with the futility of homicide as a technique but instead had extraneous causes.

Despite the many successful campaigns of nonviolent resistance throughout the twentieth century, the prevailing pro-military presumption remains firmly in place still today, more than thirty years after the end of the Cold War stand-off between the Soviet Union and the United States. Millions of lives were tragically destroyed in satellite wars during that period. The Soviet Union itself, however, dissolved not because the communists were annihilated by the capitalists but because the oppressive centralized bureaucracy of the U.S.S.R. did not deliver on its promises to produce a socialist utopia. Central committee bureaucrats and their “five-year plans” forged and rationalized as necessary for “the greater good” proved disastrous for the people of the Soviet bloc. Individual liberty was systematically suppressed in all areas of human life, squelching the very creativity and initiative that drive innovation. Tyrannically imposed communism, which severely constrained artists and entrepreneurs alike, also diminished productivity. Ultimately, communism gave way to capitalism through implosion, not the explosion of bombs.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall, democracy came to be heralded throughout the world as the primary and most desirable form of government. Imperfect as democracy can only be, given the very real dangers of ochlocracy, it is still arguably better than the micromob rule of a self-anointed few, i.e., oligarchy. One might have thought, given the widespread agreement that only democracy and free markets allow people to flourish, that war as a means of resolving conflict would by now have disappeared from the face of the planet. The Soviet experiment was a failure, and the Cold War ended more than three decades ago. Why, then, does the U.S. military budget continue to augment each year, as lawmakers rubber-stamp any and every initiative characterized by anyone as *defense*?² Why have interventions abroad become more, not less, frequent?

Since the end of the Cold War, the spirit of competition essential to free-market capitalism has indeed largely prevailed, but with notable exceptions, above all, in the for-profit military industry sector, where a symbiosis with government has created a lucrative feedback circuit of crony capitalism and a veritable industry of homicide. The primary companies in the for-profit military industry—Raytheon, Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, and others—whose largest contracts derive from the government itself, are ensured a steady stream of revenues and profit, no matter what transpires. Such companies partner directly with the Pentagon, which has remarkably “lost track” of trillions of dollars. Where has all of that money gone? It is anyone’s guess, given the Defense Department’s chronic inability to pass an audit (Anderson 2022; Morgan 2022). The sorts of waste, fraud, expensive delays, and

2. The 2023 NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act) reached an unprecedented total of \$857.9 billion, exceeding the amount requested by the president by \$45 billion. See the Fiscal Year 2023 NDAA Agreement Executive Summary at https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/fy23_ndaa_agreement_summary.pdf.

general incompetence which would lead ordinary businesses to fail, do not affect the major players in the military industry. What is worse: because of a revolving door of government officials who become industry leaders, and vice versa, the persons who make decisions about how to allocate taxpayer funds in developing and procuring weapons systems are inclined to do what they can to ensure that the death industry cash cow never runs dry.³

When the attacks of September 11, 2001, on U.S. symbols of power and the people who worked there culminated in three thousand deaths on U.S. soil, the perpetrators were depicted not only as criminals but also as combatants. This conceptualization, perhaps unsurprising, given the symbiosis between military industry and the government, was used to promote the idea that it had become necessary to mobilize the massive U.S. military apparatus to invade and occupy entire nations, beginning with Afghanistan. Thus commenced the “war on terror,” which spread like an amoeba as factional fighters fled countries under occupation, and previously nonviolent persons were galvanized to take up arms against what *they* perceived as “the evil enemy,” the invaders of their own and other Muslim lands.⁴ What ensued was a veritable free-for-all of killing, which continues on even today, more than two decades later, throughout the Middle East and Africa.⁵

The second decade of the occupations seemed particularly difficult to reconcile with the original rationalization of the 2001 invasion, for Osama bin Laden, the individual believed by many to have masterminded the attacks of September 11, 2001, was executed point-blank during a raid on Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 2, 2011. But the campaigns of state-inflicted homicide continued on long after bin Laden was gone, with most U.S. citizens having effectively signed off on whatever their leaders deemed necessary in “national defense” and blithely unaware that the occupations were themselves creating the perceived need to perpetuate and expand the “war on terror.” Eventually, in 2021, the U.S. military unceremoniously departed from Afghanistan, killing another ten innocent people on the way out the door (Lopez 2021). Today the Taliban rules that land, despite years of insistence by media propagandists and so-called foreign policy experts that the country was being democratized by its invaders.

All told, millions of people who had nothing to do with al-Qaeda or its various splinter groups and franchises have been killed, maimed, displaced, and/or left bereft by the U.S. government’s application of military force in response to the crimes of a small group of miscreants. If terrorism is the threat of the use of deadly force against

3. Two high-profile examples are former secretary of defense James Mattis and current secretary of defense Lloyd Austin, both of whom served on the boards of military companies before being appointed to lead the Pentagon.

4. “It was a simple case: non-Muslim troops attacking Muslims in a Muslim country. Fighting the US wasn’t simply permitted; it was required” (Johnsen 2013, 143).

5. The number of U.S. military bases in Africa continues to grow. By 2020, there were at least twenty-nine (Turse 2020).

innocent persons, then all such victims of the “war on terror” have been terrorized, not only on the ground, by the presence of occupiers, but also from the sky, with ominous lethal drones hovering above and threatening to strike without warning even in places where there are no soldiers on the ground to protect.

How are we to understand the abject hypocrisy of terrorizing millions of innocent people in the process of supposedly combating terrorism? How, in the wake of the twenty-year “war on terror” fiasco, can citizens and their representatives continue to believe in the presumed efficacy of military intervention? Deferring as they do to the self-proclaimed foreign policy experts, most of the taxpaying populace never entertain such thoughts, thanks to the Pentagon’s infiltration of the mainstream media.

Controlling the Narrative

Already by 2009, nearly thirty thousand persons were employed full time in the public relations wing of the Pentagon, one of the aims of which is to promote the military to the very citizens who pay for this pro-war propaganda (NBC News 2009). Because the media has been effectively captured by military propagandists, through network sponsorship and advertising, positive results are invariably trumpeted as victories, while mistakes and crimes are minimized, if not entirely ignored. Out of sight and therefore out of mind, targets in places where there is no active war underway—and there are no troops on the ground to serve as a pretext for force protection—are regularly bombed by the U.S. government. Four successive presidents to date have assumed the authority to wield the mighty weapons of war under Authorizations for Use of Military Force (AUMFs) ratified by legislators more than two decades and three administrations ago.

Now, given the veritable army of military industry lobbyists in Washington, D.C., it may not seem that surprising that a tentacle of what has effectively become the military-industrial-congressional-media-academic-pharmaceutical-logistics-banking complex⁶ should do its part to support nonstop war. What is perhaps a bit more surprising is that so many citizens should permit the progressive militarization of their government to take place before their very eyes, while multiple domestic crises—from housing and homelessness, to the ever-augmenting toll of narcotic drug overdose deaths, to medical bankruptcies, to fuel and food prices—are largely ignored by legislators.⁷

The complicity of lawmakers themselves is in many cases likely the result of having been cajoled and generously funded by lobbyists for the military industry in

6. This is the latest iteration of the military-industrial complex, or MIC, about which President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1961) sternly warned.

7. My point here is not that the military budget should be diverted to more socialism-friendly initiatives, but that it is striking that citizens should so blithely accept that billions of dollars are being spent on conflicts thousands of miles away, while domestic crises are essentially ignored.

Washington, D.C. But politicians, too, are vulnerable to the pro-war propaganda pumped out by the Pentagon. An equally, if not more, compelling factor is that candidates for public office garner popular support by portraying themselves as “strong” on defense to voters already under sway of the myth that military means are best suited to the resolution of international conflicts (Calhoun 2013). Even in the midst of the reckless (and feckless) “war on terror,” the power to control the narratives favored by warmongers was significantly enhanced with the ratification of the Smith-Mundt Modernization Act (rolled into the 2013 National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA), when the government granted itself the authority to propagandize citizens directly (Calhoun 2022a). As a result, in the wake of the “war on terror,” what might otherwise have been a greater reluctance of the populace to support further military interventions abroad (as was seen after the catastrophic U.S. deployment in Vietnam) has been suppressed.⁸

That “national defense” is always and everywhere good continues to be embraced by much of the taxpaying populace, and military programs and interventions with no discernible purpose beyond generating profits for corporate interests continue to be generously funded.⁹ It was indeed only shortly after the ignominious wind-down of the major U.S. military presence in Afghanistan that the U.S. government began pouring funds into the conflict between Ukraine and Russia. That dispute had been going on for years (including a likely CIA-supported coup in 2014¹⁰) but was suddenly and dramatically prioritized upon Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and President Joe Biden have persistently refused to support any steps toward negotiation in resolving what is essentially a border dispute between Russia and Ukraine. Russia retains the military apparatus of the former Soviet Union, and so, by injecting billions upon billions of dollars into the conflict, the U.S. government has inched the world toward what could be a catastrophic conflict between two nuclear-armed nations, given the ghastly reality of the mutually assured destruction (MAD) capacity created during the Cold War.

Legislators on both sides of the aisle, including self-styled progressives, who once upon a time numbered among the staunch antiwar activists, have voted unerringly to provide Ukraine with astounding amounts of money—now surpassing the entire military budget of Russia¹¹—even as the U.S. economy founders. The ever-augmenting deficit was caused in part by the trillions of dollars squandered throughout the

8. President George H. W. Bush gushed after the 1991 Gulf War that he had managed to overcome the “Vietnam syndrome,” i.e., what had become the reluctance of Americans to support military interventions abroad (Lisnoff 2018).

9. Scott Horton (2021) offers a scathing and comprehensive critique of the many failures throughout the “war on terror.”

10. *Ukraine on Fire*, a 2016 documentary film directed by Igor Lopatonok and featuring executive producer Oliver Stone, investigates the background behind the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia.

11. The Russian military budget has been estimated to be about \$84 billion for 2023. The total amount of aid provided to Ukraine by the U.S. government surpassed \$100 billion with the omnibus bill signed into law on December 29, 2022, which included a new infusion of \$40 billion into the conflict (Carvajal 2022).

“war on terror,” but the COVID-19 relief bills contributed significantly as well. With the repeated printing of money to fund the Ukrainian war abroad, inflation has only grown worse.

It should be obvious by now that, aside from stuffing the coffers of military industry profiteers, the “war on terror” served no purpose and indeed was a strategic failure in that it created new terrorists and sowed corruption throughout the Middle East. But the price paid for all of this was not only financial, for it also included the destruction and degradation of the lives of millions of human beings, including the thousands of U.S. troops who were killed in combat and the many thousands more who have committed suicide as a result of their harrowing wartime experiences (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs 2022). While supporting Ukraine and inveighing against Russia’s use of military force, the U.S. government has furthermore hypocritically persisted in arming Saudi Arabia in its ruthless war on Yemen, which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians and a widespread famine (Motaparthly and Wilson 2022).

The Fading Republic

Not only have military means proved to be ill-suited to resolve conflicts abroad, but they have further resulted in the progressive degradation of the U.S. republic itself, undermining the very premises on which the nation was founded. The use throughout the twenty-first century of lethal drones to assassinate terrorist suspects in lands far away is exemplary in this regard.

Unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs) have been used to deliver deadly missiles to the homes and workplaces of persons regarded as potentially dangerous to the people of the United States. In reality, such drone strikes have induced fear, anger, and trauma in populations abroad, some of whose community members have opted in response to take up arms in attempting to resist the invaders of their land and those who have been firing missiles at them and their neighbors. As a result of the entirely natural and understandable reaction of anger and hatred generated by the invasive killers themselves, this approach to fighting terrorism has produced more terrorists than it has eliminated (Turse 2022).

With regard specifically to the degradation of the U.S. republic itself, it is worth first remembering that the use of deadly force to resolve a dispute is intrinsically tyrannical, for it calls an immediate and abrupt end to the very possibility of dialogue. There is arguably no more undemocratic means of allegedly defending a democracy than through the summary execution of suspects. This is because the procedure immediately and irrevocably eliminates even the possibility of dissent, while rejecting virtually every principle on which modern democracies rest: transparency, due process, habeas corpus (the right to be indicted before being taken away, much less executed), the right to defend oneself in a court of law and be judged by a jury of one’s peers in the face of the government’s allegations of guilt. All of this has been

swept away in the name of national defense, again, because the crimes committed by a small group of people on September 11, 2001, were transformed into a pretext for endless war. There can be little doubt that the populace, including government officials, were disoriented and even discombobulated by the events of 9/11, but their rage blinded them to the effects upon citizens, too, of what swiftly came to be the normalization of assassination, or summary execution without trial.

Sliding down a slippery slope of rationalization, the U.S. government expanded the drone program to include not only factional fighters regarded as threatening to soldiers on the ground in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, but also persons located “outside areas of active hostilities.” The first of such drone strikes was carried out by the Bush administration in Yemen, a country with which the United States was not at war, on November 3, 2002, when six men suspected of complicity in terrorism were “taken out” by a missile fired at their vehicle as they drove down a road (Calhoun 2003).

Within less than a decade, U.S. citizens, too, came to be summarily executed by their very own government in intentional acts of what was rebranded as “targeted killing.”¹² Anwar al-Awlaki, Samir Khan, and al-Awlaki’s sixteen-year-old son, Abdulrahman, were all eliminated in Yemen by missiles launched from drones in the fall of 2011. This was done without any warning, much less indictment or trial. Anwar al-Awlaki was explicitly decreed by his killers to be guilty of operational terrorism before being subjected to the harshest of all penalties, capital punishment. In yet another slippery slope expansion of summary execution, the practice of annihilating citizens spread from the U.S. government to the British government as well, when in 2015 the prime minister at the time, David Cameron, authorized the Royal Air Force to eliminate British nationals in Syria (Malik, et al. 2015).

Why in the world would the citizens of ostensible democracies permit their compatriots to be executed without an indictment, much less a trial, on the basis of evidence gathered by anonymous analysts and never made public? To begin to understand what has been going on in the twenty-first century, it will be helpful to consider Gene Sharp’s explanation of how tyrannies are maintained.

While a tyrannical government is in place, much of the populace submits to its laws out of habit. Even when some citizens believe that the laws are abjectly immoral, they may nonetheless comply, not only because they fear the consequences they themselves may suffer, but also because they do not believe that nonviolent action has any chance against the iron fist of the government. Above all, they lack the confidence needed to resist their oppressor en masse by refusing to do what they are told to do and withdrawing their support from the regime.

To the mind of the typical subservient subject under dictatorial rule, the situation may appear to be akin to a suicidal mission to stop a cruel oppressor who

12. A U.S. citizen, Kamal Derwish, was killed in the drone strike in Yemen on November 3, 2002, but this appears to have been discovered after the event, as he was not the intended target.

will crush any individual who dares to dissent. In cases where they have witnessed the point-blank execution of persons criminalized for their disagreement with the regime, the subjects may quite reasonably conclude that any attempt to voice their discontent will, too, be met with death. They resign themselves to their plight: to follow orders in order to preserve their own life.

U.S. citizens do not at this point in time generally regard themselves as subject to summary execution by their government, but they are required by law to pay for the drone program, which has indeed been used to end the lives of citizen suspects at the behest of the president. Even if citizens believe that the “war on terror” was an incredible waste of money and human lives, they may continue to fund the military through agreeing to pay federal taxes, for fear of the consequences of failure to comply.

That citizens with no financial ties to the military industry continue to support initiatives which in fact undermine their own interests—degrade their security by fomenting factional terrorism among previously neutral persons, exacerbate inflation through printing money to fund other nations’ conflicts, and risk even nuclear war by undermining the first premises of MAD deterrence (Calhoun 2022b)—reveals that the government now operates in the manner of a military state to control the narrative by squelching voices of antiwar dissent. WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, who exposed war crimes committed by the U.S. government and is now being persecuted as a “spy,” is a case in point. Journalists are being shown in a dramatic way what fate awaits them should they dare to follow Assange’s lead.

A Simple Recipe for Tyranny

There are two necessary and jointly sufficient ingredients to tyranny: the denial of citizens’ right to freedom of speech, and the denial of citizens’ right to life, both of which have been evinced in the recent comportment of the U.S. government. First, by directly censoring the language of citizens themselves, through erecting the functional equivalent of a Disinformation Governance Board to control social media platforms and search engines so as to suppress dissenting narratives, the government has pronounced itself exclusively qualified to decree what is and is not “disinformation” and, correlatively, what is and is not the truth.¹³ Second, by asserting the right to execute citizens without an indictment, much less a trial by a jury of their peers for capital crimes, the government has effectively usurped the right of any citizen not only to a fair trial, but to life itself.

Despite being carried out by an ostensibly democratic government, summary execution by lethal drone exemplifies tyranny, as is illustrated by the plight

13. To offer only one of many examples of the government’s overt censorship of dissenting voices, documents recently made public reveal that eighty FBI agents were employed to work with Twitter to identify voices to suppress through shadow banning or deplatforming (Downey 2022).

of Anwar al-Awlaki. This U.S. citizen, who inveighed initially against the crimes of September 11, 2001, and, later, against the sanguinary “war on terror” waged in response, was claimed by the Obama administration to be a terrorist and summarily executed on this basis. In fact, no evidence for al-Awlaki’s direct complicity in acts of terrorism was ever presented to the citizens who paid for his death. The Obama administration’s white paper, drafted to clarify when, why, and how the use of lethal drones to kill U.S. citizens would be permitted, asserted that homicide could be used in cases where capture was infeasible (U.S. Department of Justice [2010] 2013).

Al-Awlaki was executed by remote control as he sat in a village in Yemen, but there was absolutely no reason for believing that the capture of this citizen suspect was infeasible, especially given that he had already been imprisoned in Yemen for more than a year. At what appears to have been the U.S. government’s request, the Yemeni government released al-Awlaki, who was then hunted down and killed by the drone warriors under the authorization of President Barack Obama.¹⁴ It is obviously easier to kill someone than to convict him in a court of law, where suspects are deemed innocent until proven guilty to the satisfaction of a jury of peers, and this is plausibly the reason why the U.S. government opted to end al-Awlaki’s life (Calhoun 2015). In the white paper whitewashing of the summary execution without trial of this citizen suspect, the government claimed, creatively enough, that “due process” does not require “judicial process,” but only that some “process” be followed by the executive branch of government.

The role that censorship played in this case is very important, as in the cases of all of the thousands of other suspects (whether citizens or noncitizens) killed by drones outside areas of active hostility. The government tyrannically decreed that these suspects be dispatched, even though many of the targets’ names were not known to the killers, and so the alleged criminals could not possibly have been connected in any epistemologically respectable way to any previously documented crimes. Furthermore, we now know, from documents made public by a whistleblower, Daniel Hale, that after the fact of their execution, the targets were labeled “enemy killed in action” (EKIA), provided only that they were males of military age. The government used linguistic sleight of hand effectively to deny even the possibility of these suspects’ having been erroneously killed, by defining them as guilty until proven innocent (Devereaux and Hussain 2021).

From the single drone strike carried out on August 29, 2021, when Zemari Ahmadi, an aid worker, was killed in Kabul, Afghanistan, along with nine other innocent people (seven of whom were children), it is clear that not every brown-skinned male of military age targeted by a missile launched from a U.S. drone has been guilty of a crime (in the past) or of conspiracy to commit crime (in the future). In this case, the U.S. government initially controlled the narrative, as it did in nearly

14. Investigative journalist Jeremy Scahill (2013) offers a detailed account of what happened in the disturbing case of Anwar al-Awlaki.

every other act of targeted killing throughout the “war on terror.” But investigative reporters, aided by explosives experts and locals on the ground, were able to offer an alternative, plausible, and ultimately true version of the events that transpired on that day. Not only did the U.S. government wrongly execute a group of innocent people, but they also fabricated a story according to which their annihilation of Zemari Ahmadi and his family constituted yet another victory in the “war on terror.”¹⁵

Despite the government’s claim of the authority to decide what information citizens are permitted to entertain, and its assertion of the right to end their lives without indictment or trial, many people in the United States nonetheless continue to believe themselves to inhabit a democratic land. How could persons born in a country governed democratically find themselves in the structural equivalent of a military state, which imposes its will tyrannically on citizens through the totalitarian control of information? The answer can be found through a consideration of Gene Sharp’s theory of nonviolent resistance against dictatorial regimes.

Just as tyrannical governments can be upended and replaced through a concerted program of active but nonviolent resistance, so democracies can, conversely, morph slowly into tyrannies through the progressive whittling away of citizens’ rights and liberties. As more and more individuals are transformed into compliant subjects, eventually the bulk of the populace can be brought to conform, just as occurs under totalitarian rule. When the very expression of dissent is criminalized, then it is a short distance to tyranny, for the government can label their targets as they please and dismiss the objections of dissidents by discrediting and silencing them through censorship. When censorship does not suffice, then the government may mobilize all means necessary in order to maintain their control, as can be seen in the ruthless pursuit of Julian Assange, who has languished in Britain’s Belmarsh prison for years while the U.S. government attempts to extradite him for having allegedly violated the 1917 Espionage Act, when, in fact, he is an Australian national who exposed U.S. war crimes.

The use of censorship to suppress opinions in conflict with the government’s own preferred narratives has been widespread throughout social media.¹⁶ The fact that citizens themselves have expressed support for such initiatives as the Disinformation Governance Board (DGB), through which so-called disinformation is to be suppressed, if not eliminated, by the government itself, is a clear indication that tyranny is well on its way to having been reverse engineered. Freedom of speech is one of the most fundamental rights in a genuine democracy. It is essential that people

15. It was somewhat of a surprise when the *New York Times*, which had enthusiastically supported the U.S. drone program for years, produced a compelling film about the August 29, 2021, fiasco: *How a U.S. Drone Strike Killed the Wrong Person*. September 10, 2021. Video, 11:02. At <https://www.nytimes.com/video/world/asia/100000007963596/us-drone-attack-kabul-investigation.html>.

16. Elon Musk, who acquired Twitter in 2022, has released troves of company documents revealing that the U.S. government has worked closely with Twitter to censor the speech of citizen dissidents. Matt Taibbi has undertaken a systematic analysis of those files at his Substack site (<https://substack.com/profile/263053-matt-taibbi>).

be permitted to assess for themselves the range of available perspectives on issues in order to be able to make informed decisions about which policies to support and which to reject.

Equally important, and also usurped by the government, have been citizens' rights to privacy and freedom from arbitrary search and seizure. Edward Snowden, a whistleblower who formerly worked for the National Security Agency (NSA), revealed that mass surveillance of U.S. citizens has been carried out systematically by the government through its sweeping data collection of private communications said to be justified on specious grounds of national security (MacAskill and Dance 2013). That some citizens responded to Snowden's revelations by claiming, "Innocent people have nothing to hide!" is a clear indication that, having been born in a free country, they are entirely unaware of the struggle it took for modern democratic states to be erected and power to be wrested from the monarchic and despotic leaders of the past.

We are witnessing all of this today, but because the process has been occurring incrementally, involving the slow usurpation of power from citizens by their leaders, and the muffling of those who dare to dissent, it is not perceived as real by most of the populace. The insidious molding of minds is ensured when the military's versions of events are dutifully transmitted to the public by the mainstream media as news, while conflicting narratives are systemically squelched and dismissed as enemy propaganda.

This loss of citizen power has not been effected through the swift takeover of a government by a group of self-proclaimed liberators, as occurred throughout Africa when the colonizers were replaced in country after country by formerly oppressed people, who in many cases sadly came to govern in the tyrannical manner of their predecessors, à la George Orwell's classic parable *Animal Farm*. What we are witnessing today is, instead, neither a coup nor a revolution, but a slow metamorphosis from "the land of the free and the home of the brave" to the land of the unfree and the home of the cowardly, whereby citizens themselves accede to the government's usurpation of their rights. To recognize the process currently underway, we need only to bear in mind the forces that keep tyrannies in place for so long as they do.

A society of subjects—who have renounced their right to decide how to lead their lives and who delegate all responsibility and authority to a small class of political elites—can be created incrementally, within a democratic republic, for many of the citizens will continue to support the government even as they are made less free and their liberties are stripped away. Pleasing platitudes and seductive slogans such as "Freedom is not free!" serve the regime quite well, for they appear to be undeniable, and anyone who attempts to counter them is immediately denounced as confused or misguided by supporters of the regime, many of whom are not agents of the state but rather ordinary citizens.

The primary means of maintaining a dictatorship, Gene Sharp has observed, are found in supportive citizens who have been hoodwinked into believing that their

leader deserves to be where he is by virtue of his superior power or other attributes. The way to take down a tyranny nonviolently, then, is to educate the masses so that they will withdraw their support, not by assassinating their leader, but by refusing to contribute to the maintenance of his power. The people trapped in the domain of a tyrannical regime may feel hopeless, lack confidence, and live in fear of losing their very lives should they fail to comply with the dictates of the government. To break the psychological stronghold, what needs to be done is to convince the direct agents of the tyrant, who perpetrate crimes at his behest, to refuse to carry out his orders and enact his policies, including the meting out of punishment for those who refuse to abide by the laws.

In a reverse-engineered system of tyranny, citizens turned subjects will in fact continue dutifully and sincerely to proclaim that they live in a democracy. The very fact that people have already accepted the notion that the government should be able to execute citizens without an indictment, much less a trial, is a graphic—and ghastly—illustration of how democracy has been slowly transmogrifying to tyranny, albeit unbeknownst to most citizens. Like a frog placed in a vat of room-temperature water, which is then slowly heated to the boiling point to kill it, most people will not notice what is going on until it is too late. They will not recognize that their liberties have been taken from them any more than the frog in the vat of water slowly heated to boiling will recognize that he is dead.

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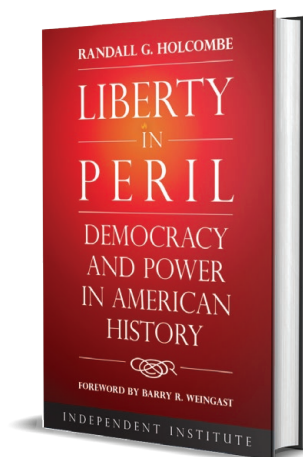
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