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HOUSE ORGAN

The National Security State Has Its Way

Last winter, in an article nicely titled “Repulsive Progressive Hypocrisy,”¹ Glenn Greenwald skewered the acceptance by self-professed liberals of Barack Obama’s betrayal of his fine campaign promises to restore respect for the Constitution after the lawless years of Dick Cheney and George W. Bush. Fifty-three percent of those polled by the *Washington Post* were political “progressives” whose advanced views include the keeping of Guantanamo Bay prison open for the business of prosecuting our Enemies in the War on Terror. More shocking still, 77 percent of liberal democrats approve the use of drones to wreak havoc on civilian populations, while absolute majorities support Obama’s decision to engage in extrajudicial murder by the state of its “enemies,” even when these include American citizens. Greenwald laments:

[I]s there even a single liberal pundit, blogger or commentator who would have defended George Bush and Dick Cheney if they (rather than Obama) had been secretly targeting American citizens for execution without due process, or slaughtering children, rescuers and funeral attendees with drones, or continuing indefinite detention even a full decade after 9/11? Please. How any of these people can even look in the mirror, behold the oozing, limitless intellectual dishonesty, and not want to smash what they see is truly mystifying to me.

It gets worse. To approve of what Bush, Cheney, and now Obama are doing in the way of wanton warfare and the ravaging of Constitutionality depends on accepting the official view that the 9/11 catastrophe itself was caused by external enemies of the United States. Yet huge numbers of people, as many as 50 percent in some surveys, believe either in active complicity or at least the tacit acquiescence of the Cheney/Bush administration in the events of 9/11.² This is not the place to take up this matter in detail. Yet the fact is that lots of people have been made deeply skeptical by findings of state shenanigans that are quite impossible to dismiss. For example, some 1500 architects, structural engineers, demolition experts, and physicists have certified that the fall of the Twin Towers and Building #7 had to have been the

¹http://www.salon.com/2012/02/08/repulsive_progressive_hypocrisy/?source=newsletter.

²The numbers are greater abroad, where they matter less. In regard to tacit acquiescence, consider how many blatant warnings of imminent attack were received in the weeks ahead of 9/11 and just as blatantly ignored—and how readily the explanation of incompetence, bad luck, etc., are accepted as explanatory. Needless to say, tacit acquiescence is compatible with active commission; it merely entails a different set of motives.

result of controlled demolition—inconceivable except as an inside job, or one requiring the collaboration of a partner such as Israel, six of whose Mossad agents were arrested that day for cheering the fall of the towers, then quietly sent home six weeks later. A rational person would think that these findings would weaken the consensus on “terror” and make it more difficult for Bush’s successor to foist more of the same on the population, much less, go beyond to new levels of criminality. But this is no country for rational persons, nor, despite the endless “leaks” and sensational disclosures, does it begin to approximate the “Open Society” which a capitalist democracy is supposed to be. It is, rather, radically skewed: a liberal society that propagates the accumulation of capital and a National Security State ruling over it, controlling its collective mind, and producing the violence essential for empire.

The National Security State

... we have about 50 percent of the world’s wealth but only 6.3 percent of its population... In this situation, we cannot fail to be the object of envy and resentment. Our real task in the coming period is to devise a pattern of relationships which will permit us to maintain this position of disparity without positive detriment to our national security... We should cease to talk about vague and... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization. The day is not far off when we are going to have to deal in straight power concepts. The less we are then hampered by idealistic slogans, the better.

—George Kennan, as Director of the State Department Policy Planning Staff, Memo PPS23, 1948³

Kennan’s memorandum was written the year following the mutation of the federal government into the National Security State, and it tells us pretty much all we have to know about this creature. Of course, a great deal of detail needs to be added, volumes and indeed libraries of it.⁴ But I believe that if every classroom and every home in the land had a copy of PPS23 and if people gathered in spaces public and private to discuss and understand its meaning and how it could be deciphered and used to explain core events from the nuclear arms race to the Kennedy assassination and all the lawless interventions, wars and hellish weaponry and waves of repression and tides of surveillance right up to 9/11, the Cheney years and the latest perfidy of Barack Obama... why then, we could begin to call the United States an Open Society and proclaim it worthy of the name of democracy and fit for rational people.

³*Foreign Relations of the United States*. Vol. 1, 1948, 524–525.

⁴The National Security Act of 1947 set into motion the complex institutional changes that both reorganized and combined the foreign policy, military, and intelligence functions that emerged from the Second World War into the machinery of global domination. The principal agencies became the Department of Defense supervising an extensively re-configured military under the direction of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and linking this with weapons production, the National Security Council, and, in the sphere of intelligence and covert operations, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Agency (NSA), keeper of the gates of surveillance and eavesdropping. A good overview of this immense subject may be found in the trilogy by Chalmers Johnson, *The American Empire Project*. (Johnson 2004a, 2004b, 2008).

We would see how an intellectual like Kennan could encapsulate the cold cruelty and hypocrisy of the United States ruling elites while reproducing the elemental delusions held by emperor, monarch, warlord, or Commander-in-Chief, who since the beginning of time thought force would yield “national security,” or its equivalent, when instead it ties the overlord to the wheel of conquest, paranoia, and retribution, leading to the recurrent, inevitable disasters of empire.

There would be lines and threads aplenty to study, including one that leads from the 35th to the 44th President. For the betrayal by Barack Obama of his fine promises to bring Law and Order to the Presidency after the G.W. Bush years may have been more than a case of opportunism. According to trustworthy accounts, Obama’s about-face happened during the period before his inauguration, when high-ranking members of the transition team decided to renege on candidate Obama’s pledge because, as one said later on, “it was thought that the CIA, NSA, and military would revolt”—in response to which another close observer added that “CIA friends confirmed [to her] that Obama would have been in danger.”⁵ Could the National Security State ever go so far as to eliminate a President who stood in its way? That depends on how one interprets the events of November 22, 1963, when John F. Kennedy went down. Was his murder the work of the “lone crazed assassin” of the official narrative; or did it occur according to the account culled in phenomenal detail by Jim Douglass (2008) of the elimination by his security associates of the one powerful individual since 1947 who had decided to stop the Cold War, the Vietnam War, and the nuclear arms race, and who could have actually brought down the National Security State had he lived. The reader should form her or his own judgment. A lot depends on the answer.

The Torments of Liberal Society

And can he who smiles on all
Hear the wren with sorrows small
Hear the small birds grief & care
Hear the woes that infants bear—

And not sit beside the nest
Pouring pity in their breast.
And not sit the cradle near
Weeping tear on infants tear

And not sit both night & day
Wiping all our tears away,
O! no never can it be
Never never can it be.

—William Blake. “On Another’s Sorrow,” verses 4–6, from *Songs of Innocence*
(of which it is the last poem)

⁵<http://readersupportednews.org/opinion2/424-national-security/7367-focus-obama-team-feared-coup-if-he-prosecuted-war-crimes>.

Well, it can be, and is.

The National Security State consists of all that does the job implied by Kennan: intervening in other countries, war-making, constructing “false-flag” terror events, spying on states, snooping on civilians, whipping up hatred of Islamic “terrorists,” tending to nearly a thousand military bases everywhere, making sure that the weapons factories of the Military-Industrial Complex are humming along and sufficiently beloved by the populace, and so forth. It’s a very big job, requiring that every Congressional District have some facilities of the Military-Industrial Complex pinned to its terrain. At many points these activities reach into the society below, for example, officer training programs in high schools and universities, the singing of “God Bless America” at baseball games in the seventh inning, and the placement of ads and favorable stories (the U.S. Army is the largest single advertiser in the U.S.). The list could be extended indefinitely, so vast is the apparatus of “security” required by the modern American imperial state.

There is, however, another vector of influence that flows from civil society to the state. It stems from the basic pattern of life in the former and contributes materially to the “security” of the latter. The common root of civil society and state is that both are tooled to secure the accumulation of capital—that is why we call our breed of civil society, “liberal society,” using the word that stands for capitalism itself as well as its more progressive aspect. Liberal society defines a kind of existential firmament for the capitalist state. It produces cadre for the state and shapes its character and consciousness so that it is suitable for the job.

The late Dean Brackley, a Jesuit who was active in El Salvador, wrote a profound book addressing the spiritual conditions of life in the metropolitan zones. Here is how Brackley describes the life-world of liberal society:

Evil hides under a pile of virtues, wreaking havoc in the name of freedom, property rights, national security, and religion. Liberal society trivializes evil and practically denies sin. Its standard discourse goes something like this. “We have found the solution to happiness (getting and spending, elections and markets). We are now in a mop-up operation on the way to paradise. We just have to eliminate terrorists and drug traffickers, clean up toxic waste sites and check global warming. But if we stay the course, better technology will solve our problems. . . .” (Brackley 2004, 21).

Trivialization of evil is evil denied and allows evil to be done. It is the joint between liberal society and the National Security State, and also a manifestation of the nihilistic end stage of capital—the time of anything goes, with morality reduced to a technical input. Anyone who resists this is not fit to rise in the National Security State, while to accept it opens up the path of achievement. To get to the top, one needs, however, to be as cold as a Kennan, as slippery as an Obama. Meanwhile the lesser ones, the middle managers, academics, and liberal pundits, follow along,

checking their soul at the door as they salute the President's use of drones and targeted assassinations.

Security is lost even as it is gained, since the wages of capitalist success are subsumed into the logic of possessive individualism, which leads to endless retribution and endless fear. Every step adumbrated by Brackley, however it may seem reasonable, is also disarticulated from the rest. Taken all in all, they comprise a gigantic trap where success opens upon the destruction of organic, ecologically rational, relations. Money is made, and the world falls apart: this is the capitalist way, even when dressed up in green.

Capitalist logic cannot grasp the Whole since it is predicated upon disintegration. Thus Kennan could not foresee that his recipe for security would be a one-way ticket to the abyss; more poignantly, we have the case of Obama, this wretch whose betrayal of his promises to overcome the lethal carbon-based economy is going to literally doom the daughters he loves, along with billions of other youth around the world, to the Hell of full-blown climate change. How can he do this!? And, returning to Blake, who then will wipe their tears away?

Capitalist society, privileging private over public satisfaction, leaves space for the love of children and pets. It also provides the social conditions for hideous abuse and neglect of little ones. Here as elsewhere, the leading capitalist power performs atrociously.

Blake, characteristically, goes deeper the simpler he sounds. The sorrow of little ones, extends first of all to nature (the wrens and other small birds), and then to children, the fruit of our own nature. But the love which is to heal them comes from the living God and passes through the human imagination. And the figure who is to wipe the tears away is drawn from Blake's favorite book of the Bible, Revelation (7:17, 21:4). The hope signified by this is what the National Security State will destroy unless we awaken.

—Joel Kovel

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