

20 Years of Government-Sponsored Tyranny

By John W. Whitehead & Nisha Whitehead, 7 September 2021

20 Years of Government-Sponsored Tyranny: The Rise of the Security-Industrial Complex from 9/11 to COVID-19

“I tell you, freedom and human rights in America are doomed. The U.S. government will lead the American people in — and the West in general — into an unbearable hell and a choking life.”—Osama bin Laden (October 2001), as reported by CNN

What a strange and harrowing road we’ve walked since September 11, 2001, littered with the debris of our once-vaunted liberties. We have gone from a nation that took great pride in being a model of a representative democracy to being a model of how to persuade a freedom-loving people to march in lockstep with a police state.

Our losses are mounting with every passing day.

What began with the post-9/11 passage of the USA Patriot Act has snowballed into the eradication of every vital safeguard against government overreach, corruption and abuse.

The citizenry’s unquestioning acquiescence to anything the government wants to do in exchange for the phantom promise of safety and security has resulted in a society where the nation has been locked down into a militarized, mechanized, hypersensitive, legalistic, self-righteous, goose-stepping antithesis of every principle upon which this nation was founded.

Set against a backdrop of government surveillance, militarized police, SWAT team raids, asset forfeiture, eminent domain, overcriminalization, armed surveillance drones, whole body scanners, stop and frisk searches, police violence and the like—all of which have been sanctioned by Congress, the White House and the courts—our constitutional freedoms have been steadily chipped away at, undermined, eroded, whittled down, and generally discarded.

The rights embodied in the Constitution, if not already eviscerated, are on life support.

Free speech, the right to protest, the right to challenge government wrongdoing, due process, a presumption of innocence, the right to self-defense, accountability and transparency in government, privacy, press, sovereignty, assembly, bodily integrity, representative government: all of these and more have become casualties in the government’s war on the American people, a war that has grown more pronounced since 9/11.

Indeed, since the towers fell on 9/11, the U.S. government has posed a greater threat to our freedoms than any terrorist, extremist or foreign entity ever could.

While nearly 3,000 people died in the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. government and its agents have easily killed at least ten times that number of civilians in the U.S. and abroad since 9/11 through its police shootings, SWAT team raids, drone strikes and profit-driven efforts to police the globe, sell weapons to foreign nations (which too often fall into the hands of terrorists), and foment civil unrest in order to keep the security industrial complex gainfully employed.

The American people have been treated like enemy combatants, to be spied on, tracked, scanned, frisked, searched, subjected to all manner of intrusions, intimidated, invaded, raided, manhandled, censored, silenced, shot at, locked up, denied due process, and killed.

In allowing ourselves to be distracted by terror drills, foreign wars, color-coded warnings, pandemic lockdowns and other carefully constructed exercises in propaganda, sleight of hand, and obfuscation, we failed to recognize that the U.S. government—the government that was supposed to be a “government of the people, by the people, for the people”—has become the *enemy* of the people.

Consider that the government’s answer to every problem has been *more* government—at taxpayer expense—and *less* individual liberty.

Every crisis—manufactured or otherwise—since the nation’s early beginnings has become a make-work opportunity for the government to expand its reach and its power at taxpayer expense while limiting our freedoms at every turn: The Great Depression. The World Wars. The 9/11 terror attacks. The COVID-19 pandemic.

Viewed in this light, the history of the United States is a testament to the old adage that liberty decreases as government (and government bureaucracy) grows. Or, to put it another way, as government expands, liberty contracts.

This is how the emergency state operates, after all, and we should know: after all, we have spent the past 20 years in a state of emergency.

From 9/11 to COVID-19, “we the people” have acted the part of the helpless, gullible victims desperately in need of the government to save us from whatever danger threatens. In turn, the government has been all too accommodating and eager while also expanding its power and authority in the so-called name of national security.

This is a government that has grown so corrupt, greedy, power-hungry and tyrannical over the course of the past 240-plus years that our constitutional republic has since given way to idiocracy, and representative government has given way to a kleptocracy (a government ruled by thieves) and a kakistocracy (a government run by unprincipled career politicians, corporations and thieves that panders to the worst vices in our nature and has little regard for the rights of American citizens).

What this really amounts to is a war on the American people, fought on American soil, funded with taxpayer dollars, and waged with a single-minded determination to use national crises, manufactured or otherwise, in order to transform the American homeland into a battlefield.

Indeed, the government’s (mis)management of various states of emergency in the past 20 years has spawned a massive security-industrial complex the likes of which have never been seen before. According to the National Priorities Project at the progressive Institute for Policy Studies, since 9/11, the United States has spent \$21 trillion on “militarization, surveillance, and repression.”

Clearly, this is not a government that is a friend to freedom.

Rather, this is a government that, in conjunction with its corporate partners, views the citizenry as consumers and bits of data to be bought, sold and traded.

This is a government that spies on and treats its people as if they have no right to privacy, especially in their own homes while the freedom to be human is being erased.

This is a government that is laying the groundwork to weaponize the public's biomedical data as a convenient means by which to penalize certain "unacceptable" social behaviors. Incredibly, a new government agency HARPA (a healthcare counterpart to the Pentagon's research and development arm DARPA) will take the lead in identifying and targeting "signs" of mental illness or violent inclinations among the populace by using artificial intelligence to collect data from Apple Watches, Fitbits, Amazon Echo and Google Home.

This is a government that routinely engages in taxation without representation, whose elected officials lobby for our votes only to ignore us once elected.

This is a government comprised of petty bureaucrats, vigilantes masquerading as cops, and faceless technicians.

This is a government that railroads taxpayers into financing government programs whose only purpose is to increase the power and wealth of the corporate elite.

This is a government—a warring empire—that forces its taxpayers to pay for wars abroad that serve no other purpose except to expand the reach of the military industrial complex.

This is a government that subjects its people to scans, searches, pat downs and other indignities by the TSA and VIPR raids on so-called "soft" targets like shopping malls and bus depots by black-clad, Darth Vader look-alikes.

This is a government that uses fusion centers, which represent the combined surveillance efforts of federal, state and local law enforcement, to track the citizenry's movements, record their conversations, and catalogue their transactions.

This is a government whose wall-to-wall surveillance has given rise to a suspect society in which the burden of proof has been reversed such that Americans are now assumed guilty until or unless they can prove their innocence.

This is a government that treats its people like second-class citizens who have no rights, and is working overtime to stigmatize and dehumanize any and all who do not fit with the government's plans for this country.

This is a government that uses free speech zones, roving bubble zones and trespass laws to silence, censor and marginalize Americans and restrict their First Amendment right to speak truth to power.

This is a government that persists in renewing the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), which allows the president and the military to arrest and detain American citizens indefinitely based on the say-so of the government.

This is a government that saddled us with the Patriot Act, which opened the door to all manner of government abuses and intrusions on our privacy.

This is a government that, in direct opposition to the dire warnings of those who founded our country, has allowed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to establish a standing army by way of programs that transfer surplus military hardware to local and state police.

This is a government that has militarized American's domestic police, equipping them with military weapons such as "tens of thousands of machine guns; nearly 200,000 ammunition magazines; a million hollow-point bullets; thousands of pieces of camouflage and night-vision equipment; and hundreds of silencers, armored cars and aircraft," in addition to armored vehicles, sound cannons and the like.

This is a government that has provided cover to police when they shoot and kill unarmed individuals just for standing a certain way, or moving a certain way, or holding something—anything—that police could misinterpret to be a gun, or igniting some trigger-centric fear in a police officer's mind that has nothing to do with an actual threat to their safety.

This is a government that has created a Constitution-free zone within 100 miles inland of the border around the United States, paving the way for Border Patrol agents to search people's homes, intimately probe their bodies, and rifle through their belongings, all without a warrant. Nearly 66% of Americans (2/3 of the U.S. population, 197.4 million people) now live within that 100-mile-deep, Constitution-free zone.

This is a government that treats public school students as if they were prison inmates, enforcing zero tolerance policies that criminalize childish behavior, and indoctrinating them with teaching that emphasizes rote memorization and test-taking over learning, synthesizing and critical thinking.

This is a government that is operating in the negative on every front: it's spending far more than what it makes (and takes from the American taxpayers) and it is borrowing heavily (from foreign governments and Social Security) to keep the government operating and keep funding its endless wars abroad. Meanwhile, the nation's sorely neglected infrastructure—railroads, water pipelines, ports, dams, bridges, airports and roads—is rapidly deteriorating.

This is a government that has empowered police departments to make a profit at the expense of those they have sworn to protect through the use of asset forfeiture laws, speed traps, and red light cameras.

This is a government whose gun violence—inflicted on unarmed individuals by battlefield-trained SWAT teams, militarized police, and bureaucratic government agents trained to shoot first and ask questions later—poses a greater threat to the safety and security of the nation than any mass shooter. There are now reportedly more bureaucratic (non-military) government agents armed with high-tech, deadly weapons than U.S. Marines.

This is a government that has allowed the presidency to become a dictatorship operating above and beyond the law, regardless of which party is in power.

This is a government that treats dissidents, whistleblowers and freedom fighters as enemies of the state.

This is a government that has in recent decades unleashed untold horrors upon the world—including its own citizenry—in the name of global conquest, the acquisition of greater wealth, scientific experimentation, and technological advances, all packaged in the guise of the greater good.

This is a government that allows its agents to break laws with immunity while average Americans get the book thrown at them.

This is a government that speaks in a language of force. What is this language of force? Militarized police. Riot squads. Camouflage gear. Black uniforms. Armored vehicles. Mass arrests. Pepper spray. Tear gas. Batons. Strip searches. Surveillance cameras. Kevlar vests. Drones. Lethal weapons. Less-than-lethal weapons unleashed with deadly force. Rubber bullets. Water cannons. Stun grenades. Arrests of journalists. Crowd control tactics. Intimidation tactics. Brutality. Contempt of cop charges.

This is a government that justifies all manner of government tyranny and power grabs in the so-called name of national security, national crises and national emergencies.

This is a government that exports violence worldwide, with one of this country's most profitable exports being weapons. Indeed, the United States, the world's largest exporter of arms, has been selling violence to the world in order to prop up the military industrial complex and maintain its endless wars abroad.

This is a government that is consumed with squeezing every last penny out of the population and seemingly unconcerned if essential freedoms are trampled in the process.

This is a government that routinely undermines the Constitution and rides roughshod over the rights of the citizenry, eviscerating individual freedoms so that its own powers can be expanded.

This is a government that believes it has the authority to search, seize, strip, scan, spy on, probe, pat down, taser, and arrest *any* individual at *any* time and for the *slightest* provocation, the Constitution be damned.

In other words, as I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People* and in its fictional counterpart *The Erik Blair Diaries*, this is not a government that believes in, let alone upholds, freedom.

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