

Rule By Brute Force: The True Nature Of Government

[Submitted by John Whitehead via The Rutherford Institute,](#)

“We are fast approaching the stage of the ultimate inversion: [the stage where the government is free to do anything it pleases](#), while the citizens may act only by permission; which is the stage of the darkest periods of human history, the stage of rule by brute force.”

-Ayn Rand

The torch has been passed to a new president.

All of the [imperial powers amassed by Barack Obama and George W. Bush](#) - to kill American citizens without due process, to detain suspects indefinitely, to strip Americans of their citizenship rights, to carry out mass surveillance on Americans without probable cause, to suspend laws during wartime, to disregard laws with which he might disagree, to conduct secret wars and convene secret courts, to sanction torture, to sidestep the legislatures and courts with executive orders and signing statements, to direct the military to operate beyond the reach of the law, to act as a dictator and a tyrant, above the law and beyond any real accountability - have been inherited by Donald Trump.

Whatever kind of president Trump chooses to be, he now has the power to completely alter the landscape of this country for good or for ill.

He has this power because every successive occupant of the Oval Office has been allowed to [expand the reach and power of the presidency](#) through the use of [executive orders, decrees, memorandums, proclamations, national security directives and legislative signing statements](#) that can be activated by any sitting president.

Those of us who saw this eventuality coming have been [warning for years](#) about the growing danger of the Executive Branch with its presidential toolbox of terror that could be used—and abused—by future presidents.

The groundwork, we [warned](#), was being laid for a new kind of government where it won't matter if you're innocent or guilty, whether you're a threat to the nation or even if you're a citizen. What will matter is what the president—or whoever happens to be occupying the Oval Office at the time—thinks. And if he or she thinks you're a threat to the nation and should be locked up, then you'll be locked up with no access to the protections our Constitution provides. In effect, you will disappear.

Our warnings went largely unheeded.

First, we sounded the alarm over George W. Bush's attempts to gut the Constitution, suspend habeas corpus, carry out warrantless surveillance on Americans, and

generally undermine the Fourth Amendment, but the Republicans didn't want to listen because Bush was a Republican.

Then we sounded the alarm over Barack Obama's prosecution of whistleblowers, targeted drone killings, assassinations of American citizens, mass surveillance, and militarization of the police, but the Democrats didn't want to listen because Obama was a Democrat and he talked a really good game.

It well may be that by the time Americans — Republicans and Democrats alike — stop playing partisan games and start putting some safeguards in place, it will be too late.

Already, Donald Trump has indicated that he will pick up where his predecessors left off: he will continue to wage war, he will continue to federalize the police, and he will operate as if the Constitution does not apply to him.

Still, as tempting as it may be, don't blame Donald Trump for what is to come.

If this nation eventually locks down... If Americans are rounded up and detained based on the color of their skin, their religious beliefs, or their political views... If law-and-order takes precedence over constitutional principles...

If martial law is eventually declared... If we find that there really is nowhere to run and nowhere to hide from the surveillance state's prying eyes and ears... And if our constitutional republic finally plunges headlong over the cliff and leaves us in the iron grip of totalitarianism...

Please, resist the urge to lay all the blame at Trump's feet.

After all, President Trump didn't create the police state.

He merely inherited it.

Frankly, there's more than enough blame to go around.

So blame Obama. Blame Bush. Blame Bill Clinton.

Blame the Republicans and Democrats who justified every power grab, every expansion of presidential powers, and every attack on the Constitution as long as it was a member of their own party leading the charge.

Blame Congress for being a weak, inept body that spends more time running for office and pandering to the interests of the monied elite than representing the citizenry.

Blame the courts for caring more about order than justice, and for failing to hold government officials accountable to the rule of law.

Blame Corporate America for taking control of the government and calling the shots behind the scenes.

Most of all, blame the American people for not having objected louder, sooner and more vehemently when Barack Obama, George W. Bush and their predecessors laid the groundwork for this state of tyranny.

But wait, you say.

Americans *are* mobilizing. They are engaged. They are actively expressing their discontent with the government. They are demanding change. They are marching in the streets, picketing, protesting and engaging in acts of civil disobedience.

This is a good development, right? Isn't this what we've been calling on Americans to do for so long: stand up and push back and say "enough is enough"?

Perhaps you're right.

Perhaps Americans *have* finally had enough. At least, *some* Americans have finally had enough.

That is to say, *some* Americans have finally had enough of *certain* government practices that are illegal, immoral and inhumane.

Although, to be quite fair, it might be more accurate to state that *some* Americans have *finally* had enough of *certain* government practices that are illegal, immoral and inhumane **provided that the ruling political party responsible for those actions is not their own.**

Yes, that sounds about right. Except that it's all wrong.

We still haven't learned a thing.

Imagine: after more than eight years in which Americans remained largely silent while the United States military ([directed by the Obama Administration](#)) bombed parts of the Middle East to smithereens—[dropping nearly three bombs an hour](#), and left a trail of innocent civilian deaths in its wake—suddenly, Americans are outraged by programs introduced by the Trump Administration that could discriminate against Muslim refugees. **Never mind that we've been killing those same refugees for close to a decade.**

Certainly, there was little outcry when the U.S. military under Obama carried out an air strike against a [Doctors Without Borders hospital](#) in Afghanistan. Doctors, patients—including children—and staff members were killed or wounded. There were also no protests when the Obama Administration targeted Anwar al-Awlaki, [an American citizen in Yemen](#), for assassination by drone strike. The man was killed without ever having been charged with a crime. Two weeks later, Obama—the recipient of a Nobel Peace Prize—authorized another drone strike that killed al-Awlaki's 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman, [also an American citizen](#).

Most recently, [picking up where President Obama left off](#), President Trump personally authorized a commando raid on a compound in Yemen suspected of harboring Al Qaeda officials. Among those killed were "at least eight women and

seven children, ages 3 to 13,” including Nora, the 8-year-old sister of the teenager killed by Obama years before.

Likewise, while most Americans failed to show much opposition to the government’s disregard for Americans’ bodily integrity, shrugging their collective shoulders dismissively over reports of their fellow citizens being subjected Americans to roadside strip searches, virtual strip searches, cavity searches and other equally denigrating acts, hundreds of thousands mobilized to protest [policies](#) that *could* be advanced by the Trump administration that *might* demean or deny equal rights to individuals [based on their gender or orientation or take away their reproductive planning choices](#). Similarly, while tens of thousands have gathered annually for a March for Life to oppose abortion, many of those same marchers seem to have no qualms about the government’s practice of shooting unarmed citizens and executing innocent ones.

This begs the question: what are Americans really protesting? Is it politics or principle?

Or is it just Trump?

For instance, in the midst of the uproar over Trump’s [appointment of Steven Bannon to the National Security Council](#), his detractors have accused Bannon of being a propagandist nationalist, and a white supremacist. Yet not one objection has been raised about the fact that the [National Security Council authorizes secret, legal, targeted killings of American citizens](#) (and others) without due process, a practice frequently employed by Obama.

The message coming across loud and clear: it’s fine for the government to carry out secret, targeted assassinations of American citizens without due process as long as the individuals advising the president aren’t Neo-Nazis.

Of course, this national hypocrisy goes both ways.

Conveniently, many of the same individuals who raised concerns over Obama’s “lawless” use of executive orders to sidestep Congress have defended Trump’s executive orders as “[taking us back to the Constitution](#).” And those who sounded the alarm over the dangers of the American police state have gone curiously silent in the face of Trump’s pledge to put an end to “[the dangerous anti-police atmosphere in America](#).”

We can’t have it both ways.

As long as we continue to put our politics ahead of our principles—moral, legal and constitutional—“we the people” will lose.

And you know who will keep winning by playing on our prejudices, capitalizing on our fears, deepening our distrust of our fellow citizens, and dividing us into polarized, warring camps incapable of finding consensus on the one true menace that is an immediate threat to all of our freedoms? The U.S. government.

In her essay on "[The Nature of Government](#)," Ayn Rand explains that the only "proper" purpose of a government is the protection of individual rights. She continues: "The source of the government's authority is 'the consent of the governed.' This means that the government is not the *ruler*, but the servant or *agent* of the citizens; it means that the government as such has no rights except the rights *delegated* to it by the citizens for a specific purpose."

When we lose sight of this true purpose of government—to protect our rights—and fail to keep the government in its place as our servant, we allow the government to overstep its bounds and become a tyrant that rules by brute force.

As Rand [explains](#):

Instead of being a protector of man's rights, the government is becoming their most dangerous violator; instead of guarding freedom, the government is establishing slavery; instead of protecting men from the initiators of physical force, the government is initiating physical force and coercion in any manner and issue it pleases; instead of serving as the instrument of *objectivity* in human relationships, the government is creating a deadly, subterranean reign of uncertainty and fear, by means of nonobjective laws whose interpretation is left to the arbitrary decisions of random bureaucrats; instead of protecting men from injury by whim, the government is arrogating to itself the power of unlimited whim—**so that we are fast approaching the stage of the ultimate inversion: the stage where the government is free to do anything it pleases, while the citizens may act only by permission; which is the stage of the darkest periods of human history, the [stage of rule by brute force](#).**

Rule by brute force.

That's about as good a description as you'll find for the sorry state of our republic.

SWAT teams crashing through doors. Militarized police shooting unarmed citizens. Traffic cops tasing old men and pregnant women for not complying fast enough with an order. Resource officers shackling children for acting like children. Citizens being jailed for growing vegetable gardens in their front yards and holding prayer services in their backyards. Drivers having their cash seized under the pretext that they *might* have done something wrong.

The list of abuses being perpetrated against the American people by their government is growing rapidly.

We are approaching critical mass.

As I make clear in my book [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#), it may already be too late to save our republic. We have passed the point of easy fixes. When the government and its agents no longer respect the rule of law—the Constitution—or believe that it applies to them, then the very contract on which this relationship is based becomes invalid.

So what is the answer?

Look to the past if you want to understand the future.

Too often, we look to the past to understand how tyrants come to power: the rise and fall of the Roman Empire; Hitler's transformation of Germany into a Nazi state; the witch hunt tactics of the McCarthy Era.

Yet the past—especially our own American history—also teaches us valuable lessons about the quest for freedom. Here's Rand [again](#):

A free society—like any other human product—cannot be achieved by random means, by mere wishing or by the leaders' "good intentions." A complex legal system, based on *objectively* valid principles, is required to make a society free and *to keep it free*—a system that does not depend on the motives, the moral character or the intentions of any given official, a system that leaves no opportunity, no legal loophole for the development of tyranny. The American system of checks and balances was just such an achievement. And although certain contradictions in the Constitution did leave a loophole for the growth of statism, the incomparable achievement was the concept of a constitution as a means of limiting and restricting the power of the government. Today, when a concerted effort is made to obliterate this point, it cannot be repeated too often that the Constitution is a limitation on the government, not on private individuals—that it does not prescribe the conduct of private individuals, only the conduct of the government—that it is not a charter *for* government power, but a charter of the citizens' protection *against* the government.

You want to save America? Then stop thinking like Republicans and Democrats and start acting like Americans.

The only thing that will save us now is a concerted, collective commitment to the Constitution's principles of limited government, a system of checks and balances, and a recognition that they—the president, Congress, the courts, the military, the police, the technocrats and plutocrats and bureaucrats—work for us.