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Serfs on the Plantation, Part 3

by Jacob G. Hornberger

The welfare state was collapsing under its own weight in the later stages of the Roman Empire. Those who were on the dole were demanding more dole. Those who were paying the taxes were demanding lower taxes. The authorities were in a quandary. If they promised more dole to the welfare recipients, they were met with the possibility of revolt from the taxpayers.

The authorities devised an almost perfect way to maintain their power over the Roman citizenry. They sought and found foreign dictators who threatened to bring down the empire. By "defending" the empire from the barbarians, the Roman citizens — dole recipients and taxpayers alike — would do whatever was necessary to save the nation from the barbarians. Thus, in times of foreign crises, they would temporarily set aside their grievances against the empire and rally to the side of their Caesar.

One of the favorite practices of the authorities was to capture the foreign barbarian so that he could be paraded in chains in the Roman arena, to the joyous screams of the Roman people. Through "bread and circuses," the Roman authorities were able continually to distract the Roman citizenry from domestic problems. The dole continued to expand. Taxes continued to rise. And the empire continued to head toward collapse.

American governmental officials know exactly what they are doing when they tell us that we are threatened by barbarians in Panama, Iraq, Somalia, and Yugoslavia. Sixty years of the welfare state and the managed economy have brought nothing but failure. American welfare recipients — poor, middle class, and rich alike — are demanding more dole. But American taxpayers are resisting the imposition of higher taxes. And more and more Americans are gaining a sense that their beloved welfare state and managed economy are headed toward collapse.

The only solution, of course, is to end, not reform, this evil and immoral way of life that was adopted sixty years ago. But, unfortunately, those who benefit from the welfare state do not intend to relinquish their privileged positions easily. Like their Roman predecessors, they are desperately in search of threats to America thousands of miles away. And, like in ancient times, Americans are expected to "rally 'round the flag" and temporarily forget their domestic problems.

Recall the invasion of Panama. Antonio Noriega, the former dictator of Panama, threatened the security of the United States through the sale of drugs. Therefore, it was necessary to conquer and capture him before he destroyed the United States. Americans temporarily forgot their grievances against the state in their ecstasy over seeing this foreign barbarian captured, chained, and imprisoned in the U.S. Several years later, Americans ignore the inconvenient fact that there are more drugs being pushed through Panama than ever before.

But Noriega was only a "small" dictator and, therefore, provided only a temporary respite from domestic problems. A much bigger threat was necessary. That came in form of Saddam Hussein, a dictator who was supposedly the biggest threat to the United States since Adolf Hitler. Of course, one of the reasons he was such a big threat was that the U.S. government had provided much of the funding to enable him to build his military empire. But the American people ignored that fact — in addition to the fact that U.S. governmental officials lied and tried to cover up the American government's direct role in building up this newly found threat to America. All that mattered was that Saddam Hussein threatened to storm the gates of the United States.

And so virtually everyone forgot America's domestic problems during this international "crisis." Like in ancient Rome, they rallied 'round the flag in support of their ruler and his national honor. And everyone was expected to silence his dissent until the "emergency" was over.

Sometimes, it is difficult to find a dictator who is, at least arguably, a major threat to the United States. So, the next distraction was a "humanitarian" one — the invasion of Somalia. "We are invading to help the poor, starving black people of Somalia," American officials exclaimed. And, again, temporarily forgetting their problems at home, the American people rejoiced over their "national goodness." And they conveniently ignored a discomfoting question: if the U.S. government was, all of a sudden, so devoted to helping poor, starving black people, then why was it, at the very same time, putting Haitian immigrants into concentration camps rather than permitting them to enter the United States?

But there were even more disquieting aspects of the Somali invasion that Americans would prefer to ignore. These aspects deal with the principles enunciated in the Second, Fourth, and Fifth Amendments to the United States Constitution.

When American forces initially invaded Somalia, we were told that under no circumstances would they confiscate weapons belonging to the Somalis. This was entirely a humanitarian mission — not a waging of war.

That "commitment" to the right to own arms lasted, at most, about two weeks. After that, American forces began confiscating weapons whenever they deemed it appropriate. That was not the worst of it. The military forces also began conducting warrantless searches of people, homes, and businesses in their insatiable thirst to find and confiscate weapons. The mission was clear: disarm the citizenry so as to ensure greater compliance with the orders of American military commanders.

The average American would respond, "But the Constitution does not extend to Somalia." Quite right. But that's not the point. The point is that American governmental officials have no principled commitment to the rights enunciated in the Bill of Rights. If they did have such a commitment, they would have taken the following position in Somalia: "People have a right to own arms, and we shall not interfere with that. Moreover, people have a right to be free from unreasonable searches and seizures of their persons, homes, and businesses; therefore, we shall not conduct any searches until a judicial mechanism, military or non-military, is in place by which search warrants can be sought and secured."

The uncomfortable truth that most American don't want to face is that American governmental officials despise the rights of the people and the restrictions on governmental power enunciated in the American Constitution. They despise the right to bear arms. They despise restrictions on searches and seizures.

What about such rights as the presumption of innocence and trial by jury? Again, the Somali experience shows us the attitude of American governmental officials. After the withdrawal of American forces, several United Nations troops were attacked and killed. The result? American military forces rushed to Somalia and attacked and killed several followers of the Somali warlord General Mohamed Aidid. Why the attack on them? Because U.S. governmental officials "believed" that they were the ones who attacked the United Nations forces. Was an indictment for the murder of the U.N. forces ever issued? Was there ever a trial? Of course not. Freed from all constraints, the U.S. government "knew" who was guilty and killed them.

The average American will respond, "War is hell." Perhaps. But where is the war? This was a "humanitarian" mission. Congress never declared war on Somalia. And none of the Somali warlords have declared war on the United States. The attack on the U.N. forces may have constituted a case of murder. But the situation presented an ideal opportunity for U.S. governmental officials: exercise omnipotent power over people's lives — and punish them severely for wrongdoing without having to worry about such technicalities as the presumption of innocence and trial by jury.

And most Americans do not want to recognize that their fate now rests firmly in the hands of their president and the Security Council of the United Nations. The president no longer requires the permission of Congress to commit troops to military action. All he needs, at most, is the approval of the Security Council. One can only wonder how long it will be before an American president, acting in concert with the U.N., sends the blue-helmeted troops to quell disturbances in Los Angeles and other cities across America — under a U.N. resolution temporarily suspending such "technicalities" as gun ownership, freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures, the presumption of innocence, trial by jury, and habeas corpus.

And now we see that, despite initial setbacks, America's rulers are determined to involve this country in the civil war in the former Yugoslavia. "If we don't bomb the Serbs today," the argument goes, "they will be storming the gates of America tomorrow."

As America's welfare state and managed economy head toward collapse, the search for foreign barbarians goes on. What happens if the American people, unlike their Roman counterparts, see through the scam and the sham? What happens if they demand an end to America's welfare and warfare empire? Then the authorities will deal with the dissenters in the same way that their Roman predecessors did: they will smash anyone who dares to challenge the cult of the omnipotent state.

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This article was published in the August 1993 edition of *Freedom Daily*.