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*Wise men put their trust in ideas and not in
circumstances.*

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The Future of Freedom Foundation is a nonprofit educational foundation whose mission is to advance liberty and the libertarian philosophy by providing an uncompromising moral, philosophical, and economic case for individual liberty, free markets, private property, and limited government.

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Egypt's Lessons for Americans, Part 1

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



The military coup in Egypt last summer holds some valuable lessons for Americans, especially with respect to such things as freedom, democracy, and the U.S. national-security state, which has been an important part of American life since the end of World War II. The coup provides an especially important lesson with respect to America's founding principles of fundamental rights, freedom, and limited government.

Among the founding features of the United States was a deep antipathy toward standing armies. The reason? The Founding Fathers understood that standing armies posed a grave threat to the freedom and well-being of the citizenry of a nation. They recognized that stand-

ing armies were the primary means by which governments were able to subjugate their citizens and enforce a regime of tyranny against them.

The following quotes reflect this antipathy:

Commonwealth of Virginia, 1788: "Standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty, and therefore ought to be avoided, as far as the circumstances and protection of the community will admit."

Pennsylvania Convention: "As standing armies in time of peace are dangerous to liberty, they ought not to be kept up."

James Madison: "A standing military force, with an overgrown executive will not long be companions to liberty.... Throughout all Europe, the armies kept up under the pretext of defending, have enslaved the people."

Patrick Henry: "A standing army we shall have, also, to execute the execrable commands of tyranny; and how are you to punish them?"

Henry St. George Tucker: "Wherever standing armies are kept up, and when the right of the people to keep and bear arms is, under any color or pretext whatsoever, prohibited, liberty, if not already annihilated, is on the brink of destruction."

In St. George Tucker's reference to people's right to keep and bear

arms, he was referring to the right and ability of people to forcibly resist tyranny at the hands of their own government, a tyranny that inevitably was enforced by the standing army.

The Second Amendment

That was the principal idea behind the Second Amendment to the Constitution. It guaranteed the right to keep and bear arms as an insurance policy against tyranny being imposed and enforced against the American people by their own government. Our ancestors believed that without the right to keep and bear arms, all other rights and guarantees became meaningless, because would-be tyrants would have nothing to fear if they suspended other rights and freedoms. With a well-armed citizenry, on the other hand, there was always the possibility of armed resistance to tyranny, which itself served as a check on tyranny.

Many modern-day Americans are shocked to hear such things. They have been taught that the right to keep and bear arms is about defending one's home against burglars, or self-defense against murderers, or just shooting deer. They have been inculcated with the notion that the federal government is

a good, compassionate, and benevolent government, one that takes care of people with Social Security, health care, education, food, housing, regulations, and drug laws. The notion that the Second Amendment is a protection against federal tyranny just doesn't jibe with how many Americans have come to view the federal government.

The Second Amendment guaranteed the right to keep and bear arms as an insurance policy against tyranny.

Not so with our American ancestors. When one carefully considers the nature of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, it is easy to recognize that our ancestors had no interest in bringing into existence a government of general powers, one in which democratically elected officials would be empowered to do whatever they felt was in the best interests of the nation. Such distrust was reflected in the fact that the Constitution itself explicitly limited the proposed government to the exercise of a relatively small set of specific powers, ones that were enumerated in the Constitution itself. If a power wasn't enumerated, the federal government wasn't permitted to exercise it.

To further weaken the federal government, the Framers divided it into three separate branches — the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, each with its own specified powers. For example, to ensure that the president could not easily send the nation into war, as rulers with omnipotent powers had done throughout history, the Framers delegated the power to declare war to the legislative branch and the power to wage war to the executive branch. Thus the president could wage war only if Congress declared it.

The Bill of Prohibitions

Still distrusting this new government with divided authority and limited powers, our American ancestors ensured the passage of the Bill of Rights, which really should have been called a Bill of Prohibitions, given that it doesn't give rights but instead prohibits the federal government from infringing on rights. The Bill of Rights made it clear that the federal government would be expressly prohibited from having the power to deprive people of such fundamental rights as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, the right to peaceably assemble, the right to privacy, and the right to keep and bear arms. It also

clarified that before the federal government could punish people for crimes, it would have to honor and ensure the exercise of important procedural rights and guarantees, such as trial by jury, right to counsel, right to confront witnesses, and others enumerated in the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, and Eighth Amendments.

If a power wasn't enumerated, the federal government wasn't permitted to exercise it.

Why were our American ancestors so insistent on the inclusion of the Bill of Rights? Because they were convinced that in the absence of the Bill of Rights, the type of people that federal power would attract to public office would inevitably do the sorts of things that the Bill of Rights prohibits. Therefore, people wanted to make it clear that no matter what the circumstances, the federal government was prohibited from infringing on or suspending the fundamental rights and guarantees of the people. Our ancestors believed that the express enumeration of the rights and guarantees in the Bill of Rights would reinforce the principle of limited, enumerated powers of the Constitution. And it is important to note that there

were no exceptions provided, not even for “crises.”

Thus it’s no coincidence that for more than a hundred years after the ratification of the Constitution, Americans lived without an enormous permanent military establishment and with the right of the people to keep and bear arms.

Egypt: victim of its own army

Egypt’s military coup last summer would not have surprised our American ancestors. That’s precisely the type of thing they would have predicted for any nation that has a standing army and in which people are prohibited from owning guns.

For decades the foundation of Egypt’s government has been the military. Sometimes it recedes to the background, and other times it comes to the forefront with violent brutality. Regardless, Egypt’s military is the ultimate source of governmental power in Egypt.

To deal with that crisis, Egypt’s military regime assumed extraordinary emergency powers.

To view it another way, the military forms the base of the national government. On top of that foundation are the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of the govern-

ment. As long as those branches are doing things that please the military, there is no problem. But if any or all of those three branches engage in conduct that displeases the military, they are subject to being shut down or reformed in ways that are pleasing to the military. In the final analysis, the military calls the shots in Egypt.

Some 30 years ago, the president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, was assassinated. Seizing on the crisis, the military appointed one of its own as president — General Hosni Mubarak. To deal with that crisis, Egypt’s military regime assumed extraordinary emergency powers — “temporary” powers that remained in existence for some three decades and that still remain in existence today, including the power to arbitrarily arrest people, torture them, incarcerate them indefinitely without trial, and even execute them without due process of law.

By all measures, the Egyptian military regime, along with the extraordinary emergency powers it exercises, epitomizes the concept of tyranny. In fact, that is the reason the Egyptian people ultimately went into the streets during the Arab Spring to protest against Mubarak’s rule. The demands made by the protestors included not only

Mubarak's ouster but also the relinquishment of those "emergency" powers, which had repeatedly and consistently been employed against the people — decades after the crisis that gave rise to those powers.

What the Egyptian people failed to realize, however, was that the problem they faced wasn't Mubarak but rather their governmental system itself, a system in which their standing army constituted the bedrock of Egyptian society. In fact, owing to its omnipotent position in Egyptian life for the past several decades, the Egyptian standing army has come to have a highly privileged position in society.

As the ultimate source of government power, the military answers to no one.

As the ultimate source of government power, the military answers to no one. It approves its own expenditures, which are kept secret from the public. Its tentacles run throughout the Egyptian economy, with the military owning and operating a myriad of commercial establishments to increase its income, including hotels.

The Egyptian military justifies its existence in part based on the same rationale that the U.S. mili-

tary-industrial complex uses to justify its own existence here at home. The military says that it creates jobs for Egyptians and that the Egyptian economy would collapse without the enormous economic presence of the military. It also says that "national security" depends on its exalted position within Egypt's governmental structure.

But nothing could be further from the truth. The Egyptian military, just like the U.S. military-industrial complex, is more in the nature of an enormous cancerous tumor that sucks the lifeblood out of an economy. And it serves as the principal means of enforcing a brutal tyranny on the Egyptian people.

In fact, by all measures the Egyptian system represents dictatorship and tyranny in their purest form.

The Arab Spring's victory and defeat

As a consequence of the Arab Spring demonstrations, Mubarak was ousted from the presidency, at which point he relinquished his presidential powers to the Egyptian military, which proceeded to call for a democratic presidential election. However, it was always understood, at least by the military, that regardless of who won the election and regardless of any constitution that would be enacted, the military

would continue to hold its exalted and privileged position as the bedrock of any governmental system. That demand, the military constantly made clear, was nonnegotiable.

When the presidential election was finally held, the result stunned most everyone. The winner, Mohamed Morsi, wasn't a lackey of the military but instead an Islamist who had long opposed Egypt's military dictatorship. Nonetheless, knowing that refusing to permit Morsi to assume office might have adverse consequences, the military permitted Morsi to take office.

Perhaps as part of a quid pro quo, Morsi ended up making the biggest mistake of his life. Morsi agreed that as part of Egypt's new constitution the military would continue to be the foundation of Egypt's governmental system.

It was a mistake whose consequences our Founding Fathers could have easily foreseen, for they knew that standing armies can be a grave threat not only in the hands of a ruler against the citizenry but also against a ruler himself. As Egyptians have learned, when a standing army has all the planes, guns, bullets, troops, and tanks, there isn't much that a democratically elected president who is ousted

in a military coup can do about it. This also applies to his disarmed supporters.

What about the role of the U.S. government in all this? After all, the U.S. government has long portrayed itself as the world's great spreader of democracy. Wasn't the spreading of democracy one of the many alternative justifications for invading Iraq after the WMD justification disintegrated? Isn't that what every American student is taught in school — that one of the principal aims of U.S. foreign policy is to spread democracy?

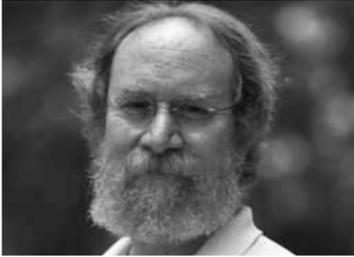
The Egyptian coup — and the American reaction to it — served to pierce those myths. The coup brings to light the discomfiting truth that the U.S. government has been — and continues to be — one of the biggest and most powerful enablers of dictatorship and tyranny in the world.

Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

NEXT MONTH:
“Egypt’s Lessons
for Americans, Part 2”
by Jacob G. Hornberger

Is Edward Snowden a Lawbreaker?

by Sheldon Richman



Most people believe that Edward Snowden, who has confirmed that the U.S. government spies on us, broke the law. Even many of his defenders concede this.

While in one sense the statement “Snowden broke the law” *may* be trivially true, in another, deeper sense it is untrue. He may have violated the terms of legislation passed by Congress and signed by a president (criminal intent would have to be proved), but a venerable line of thought says *legislation* is not the same thing as law. (F.A. Hayek drew the distinction, obviously, in *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, volume 1: “Unlike law itself, which has never been ‘invented’ in the same sense, the invention of legislation came relatively late in the history of man-

kind.”) Legislation may reflect the law, but it may also contradict it. In this line of thought, which dates back to antiquity, “law” refers to natural law. Any legislative product that conflicts with the natural law, so this philosophical tradition holds, is no law at all.

Auburn University philosopher Roderick Long points out that the principle *lex iniusta non est lex* — an unjust law is not a law —

was once, and indeed for over two millennia, the dominant position in western philosophy of law... This doctrine was upheld by Socrates, Plato, and Xenophon, by the Stoics and by Cicero, by Augustine and Aquinas, and by Blackstone as well. The traditional idea was that law must be distinguished from mere force by its authority, and that nothing unjust could have genuine *authority*.

The great American libertarian political philosopher Lysander Spooner (1808–1887) applied this principle in his characteristically consistent and rigorous manner. Indeed, Long notes that Spooner took the principle further than his predecessors “because traditional natural law theory recognises positive

law as an additional source of obligation,” while Spooner’s post-Civil War writing “maintains that legislators cannot add any new obligations to the body of law.” (In his paper, “Inside and Outside Spooner’s Jurisprudence,” Long distinguishes between Spooner’s prewar and postwar thinking on the relationship between natural law and positive law, but says “the difference ... is not as great as it might appear.” See the paper online for details.)

In 1882 Spooner defined natural law as “the science of justice,” discoverable by reason,

the science of all human rights; of all a man’s rights of person and property; of all his rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

It is the science which alone can tell any man what he can, and cannot, do; what he can, and cannot, have; what he can, and cannot, say, without infringing the rights of any other person.

It is the science of peace; and the only science of peace; since it is the science which alone can tell us on what conditions mankind can live in peace, or ought to live in peace, with each other.

Natural law

In his 1886 “A Letter to Grover Cleveland,” Spooner elaborated on what natural law is:

Let me then remind you that justice is an immutable, natural principle; and not anything that can be made, unmade, or altered by any human power.

It is also a subject of science, and is to be learned, like mathematics, or any other science. It does not derive its authority from the commands, will, pleasure, or discretion of any possible combination of men, whether calling themselves a government, or by any other name.

It is also, at all times, and in all places, the supreme law. And being everywhere and always the supreme law, it is necessarily everywhere and always the only law.

But if that is so, where does it leave the so-called “lawmakers,” the people who solemnly issue decrees from their exalted seats in Congress, state legislatures, and city councils?

Lawmakers, as they call themselves, can add nothing to it,

nor take anything from it. Therefore all their laws, as they call them, — that is, all the laws of their own making, — have no color of authority or obligation. It is a falsehood to call them laws; for there is nothing in them that either creates men's duties or rights, or enlightens them as to their duties or rights. There is consequently nothing binding or obligatory about them. And nobody is bound to take the least notice of them, unless it be to trample them under foot, as usurpations.

Nothing binding or obligatory can be found in those decrees as such, Spooner said. In other words, the obligations of natural law — essentially not to trespass on the person and property of others — pre-exist and are not the result of anything that legislators say.

**The obligations of
natural law preexist and are not
the result of anything that
legislators say.**

And if perchance Congress should pass a law that coincides with the natural law?

If they command men to do justice, they add nothing to men's obligation to do it, or to any man's right to enforce it. They are therefore mere idle wind, such as would be commands to consider the day as day, and the night as night.

Legislation vs. the law

Statutes forbidding murder, rape, torture, and theft, then, are redundant, adding nothing to our natural obligations as human beings. But legislation consistent with justice is the exception, not the rule. What, then, is the status of "laws" that contravene the natural law? Spooner answered,

If they command or license any man to do injustice, they are criminal on their face. If they command any man to do anything which justice does not require him to do, they are simple, naked usurpations and tyrannies. If they forbid any man to do anything, which justice could permit him to do, they are criminal invasions of his natural and rightful liberty. In whatever light, therefore, they are viewed, they are utterly destitute of everything like author-

ity or obligation. They are all necessarily either the impudent, fraudulent, and criminal usurpations of tyrants, robbers, and murderers, or the senseless work of ignorant or thoughtless men, who do not know, or certainly do not realize, what they are doing...

It is intrinsically just as false, absurd, ludicrous, and ridiculous to say that lawmakers, so-called, can invent and make any laws, of their own, authoritatively fixing, or declaring, the rights of individuals, or that shall be in any manner authoritative or obligatory upon individuals, or that individuals may rightfully be compelled to obey, as it would be to say that they can invent and make such mathematics, chemistry, physiology, or other sciences, as they see fit, and rightfully compel individuals to conform all their actions to them, instead of conforming them to the mathematics, chemistry, physiology, or other sciences of nature.

The “laws” that prohibit Edward Snowden (or anyone else) from telling us that the NSA routinely collects our telephone data and has access to our Internet records are decrees of the kind that “forbid any man to do anything, which justice could permit him to do.” They are therefore “criminal invasions of his natural and rightful liberty.”

Snowden should be left free, and those responsible for the spy programs should face justice.

Sheldon Richman is vice president of The Future of Freedom Foundation, editor of Future of Freedom, and author of Tethered Citizens: Time to Repeal the Welfare State and two other books published by FFF. Visit his blog, “Free Association,” at www.sheldonrichman.com.

NEXT MONTH:
“The Phony Trade Off between
Privacy and Security”
by Sheldon Richman

Voting Rights as Bogus Panaceas

by James Bovard



The Supreme Court struck down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act last June. “Liberals” were horrified and reacted as if the Civil War had been fought in vain. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Ginsburg denounced the decision for its “hubris,” Rep. John Lewis (D-GA) condemned it as a “dagger” stab at civil rights, and Attorney General Eric Holder warned that he would not let the court’s ruling hinder Justice Department activism to assure “citizens’ full and free exercise of the franchise.” In reality, statistics put the spotlight on voting because it encourages people to view ballots as a panacea — regardless of how many rampages politicians commit after the polling booths close.

The Voting Rights Act was enacted in 1965 after the brutal and

bloody repression of peaceful black protesters by Alabama and other southern states. In the decades after the act passed, black voter registration soared. The cities of Selma and Montgomery — notorious for civil-rights-era violence — now have black mayors. Nationwide, blacks had a higher turnout in last fall’s presidential election than did whites.

Thanks to the Supreme Court decision, southern states will no longer have to kowtow to the Justice Department when they do something as picayune as move a polling location across the street. But, according to Ginsburg and many pundits, any decrease in federal power over state and local governments practically guarantees a new Jim Crow era.

Ginsburg declared in her dissent, “The grand aim of the Act is to secure to all in our polity equal citizenship stature.” But “equal citizenship stature” does nothing to remedy the great and growing inequality between the citizen and the state. The larger government grows, the more irrelevant the individual voter becomes. The power of government agencies dwarfs the influence of the individual voter; members of Congress become fixated on getting favors from federal agencies rather than protecting citizens from the

executive branch. The so-called representatives are far more interested in getting a new Housing and Urban Development grant for their home districts than in protecting homeowners from the violent spill-over from a public-housing project.

The Voting Rights Act

The Voting Rights Act is part of a modern catechism that sees voting as practically the alpha and omega of freedom. In a speech delivered when he signed the law, Lyndon Johnson assured the audience, “This right to vote is the basic right without which all others are meaningless. It gives people, people as individuals, control over their own destinies.” But permitting people to vote provides no assurance that citizens will not be killed after the polling booths close.

Earlier in 1965, in a phone call to Martin Luther King Jr., Johnson declared, “I just don’t see how anybody can say that a man can fight in Vietnam but he can’t vote.” The fact that people could vote did nothing to nullify Johnson’s dictatorial power over draftees. Tens of thousands of conscripts died in an unpopular war that occurred largely because the president had unlimited power to commit them to a pointless foreign conflict on false pretenses. As

early as 1965, newspaper editorials referred to the “credibility gap” between the Johnson administration’s assertions and the facts on the ground in South Vietnam. Regardless of how many lies Johnson told about the war, young Americans were still obliged to follow his orders to the death in the jungles and rice paddies.

The fact that people could vote did nothing to nullify Johnson’s dictatorial power over draftees.

Johnson also proclaimed that the Voting Rights Act “is nothing less than granting every American Negro his freedom to enter the mainstream of American life.” While Johnson loved to portray himself as a savior, this act failed to protect blacks from federal rampages. For most of the last five years of King’s life, he was “the target of an intensive campaign by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to ‘neutralize’ him as an effective civil rights leader,” according to a 1976 report by the Senate Select Committee on U.S. Government Intelligence Activities (known as the Church Committee). King’s home and office were wiretapped and, on 16 occasions, the FBI placed wiretaps in King’s motel rooms, seeking

information on the “private activities of King and his advisers” that could be used to “completely discredit” them. The FBI sought to block the publication of articles that praised King. The FBI even set up its own Klan organization that savagely attacked civil-rights protesters. Seeking to subvert black civil-rights organizations, the FBI ordered its field offices to “exploit conflicts within and between groups; to use news media contacts to disrupt, ridicule, or discredit groups ... and to gather information on the ‘unsavory backgrounds’ — immorality, subversive activity, and criminal activity — of group members,” according to the 1976 Senate report. In San Diego, the FBI instigated violence between the local Black Panthers and a rival black organization, helping spur several killings.

The fact that a far higher percentage of blacks voted after 1965 also failed to prevent Congress from declaring a war on drugs and passing one sweeping law after another that locked legions of people away for possessing politically incorrect substances. Thanks in part to crackdowns on narcotics, the incarceration rate of black high-school dropouts increased almost sevenfold between 1960 and 2000, according to a 2009 study by Har-

vard professor George Borjas and colleagues. More than 10 percent of black males aged 20 to 34 were behind bars as of 2006, according to a study published in the *Journal of American History*. The impact of the Voting Rights Act was trimmed by the vast increase in the number of minorities with felony convictions, which automatically barred them from casting a ballot in many states.

The failure of the Voting Rights Act to restrain government power was ignored after the Supreme Court decision.

But the failure of the Voting Rights Act to restrain government power was ignored after the Supreme Court decision. Obama announced that he was “deeply disappointed” by the ruling and promised that his administration will “do everything in its power to ensure a fair and equal voting process.” He also urged Congress “to pass legislation to ensure every American has equal access to the polls.”

Yet the worst violation of “voting rights” is the notion that election winners should have unlimited power. And nothing epitomizes that power more than Obama’s drone-assassination program by which he claims a prerogative to kill

anyone in the world whom he labels a threat. If the president can seize as much power as he pleases, then Americans are voting for a master, not for a chief law-enforcement officer. If the president is unconstrained, America is perilously close to what the Founding Fathers dreaded — “slavery by constitutional forms.”

Voting blindly

Another irony is that Obama and his allies believe that vesting more arbitrary power in the Justice Department will automatically result in a triumph for democracy. But this is the same Justice Department that has mercilessly prosecuted whistleblowers since the beginning of Obama’s reign — including Thomas Drake, Edward Snowden, and John Kiriakou. Attorney General Holder apparently believes in permitting people to vote but then gagging government employees and blindfolding everyone in the land to prevent people from learning what the government is doing with all the power voters supposedly gave it.

Incumbents withholding information and deceiving voters is as much a violation of voters’ rights as barring them from the polling booth. If Americans had known the

full extent of George W. Bush’s torture regime and other civil-liberties violations, he might have failed to win reelection in 2004. If Americans had known that Obama’s National Security Agency was vacuuming up their email and phone data, he might have gotten tossed out by voters last November.

Politicians often talk of elections as the noblest episodes in the life of a people. But because politicians have granted themselves leeway to intervene in people’s lives without end, the reality is far more sordid. H.L. Mencken deftly described an election as an “advance auction sale of stolen goods.” The bigger government becomes, the more votes it can buy. And every bribe or penalty that incumbents can exploit biases election results.

Voting becomes a process by which voters consecrate the loss of their rights and freedoms.

What does a vote mean? Whatever a winning politician says it means. The larger the government, the more those voting levers confer blank checks on rulers. Voting becomes a process by which voters consecrate the loss of their rights and freedoms, rather than actively control the government.

Trumpeting the importance of voting deludes people into believing that they have a leash on the government. More than 300 years ago, William Penn, the founder of Pennsylvania, declared, “Let the people think they govern, and they will be govern’d.” Having a vote does nothing to prevent a person from being molested by the Transportation Security Agency, spied on by the National Security Agency, or harassed by the Internal Revenue Service. While the voting lever the citizen flips can be counteracted by a hundred different sources, from other voters to political deals to judges’ edicts to outright fraud, government employees have such “levers” over the voter as seizing his bank account, destroying his job, or evicting him from his home.

Voting in a democracy nowadays often means trusting one’s life, liberty, and property to one of two candidates, neither of whom seems trustworthy. The more that voting is glorified as a panacea, the more lackadaisical people become about preserving their constitutional rights. The freedom to vote is valuable primarily as a means to safeguard other freedoms. But, at this point, voting is little more than an

unreliable Kevlar jacket against political and bureaucratic assaults.

Sen. John Taylor, in his 1822 classic *Tyranny Unmasked*, wrote that the Revolutionary War had given the American people a “commission to overturn political idolatry.” Taylor and many others early in our nation’s history hoped that subsequent generations of Americans would not be gulled by political forms and empty promises. But their high hopes for humanity have yet to be fulfilled. At a minimum, Americans must recognize that voting is a charade if politicians continue doing as they damn well please regardless of voters’ verdicts.

James Bovard serves as policy adviser to The Future of Freedom Foundation and is the author of a new ebook memoir, Public Policy Hooligan, Attention Deficit Democracy, and eight other books.

NEXT MONTH:
“AmeriCorps:
Idealistic Triumph or Usual
Buffoonery?”
by James Bovard

Gabriel Kolko Revisited, Part 2: Kolko Abroad

by Joseph R. Stromberg



Gabriel Kolko's historical writing hinges on the interrelations of economic, political, and ideological power in American history. His later work increasingly focused on those phenomena in relation to war, peace, and empire. As his project went forward, Kolko increasingly departed from that Marxist framework in which state power becomes so utterly subordinate as to be historically negligible. The result has been a more realistic, but no less radical, critique.

In *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (1969, especially chapters 7 and 8), Kolko connected the domestic and foreign aspects of American political capitalism in terms of class, state and private

institutions, economic goals, and supporting ideology. We find here very useful reflections on the forces and ideas underlying “vaunting and fear” and “perpetual war for perpetual peace” (timeworn Old Right phrases) as inevitable companions of American foreign activities. (We can only sample some key points here.)

Class. With similar class origins and the same education, the “very top foreign policy decision-makers were ... intimately connected with dominant business circles in their law firms.” The result has been a “dual relationship — one which uses the political structure to advance the domestic and global economic interests of American [political] capitalists,” one that “has characterized Washington leaders for the better part of this century.”

Ends and means. U.S. policy-makers use the dependence of raw-material-producing nations as leverage for gaining access to their markets and resources. Strangely enough, for all the American rhetoric about free enterprise, America “is the world's leading state trader, even though it has consistently attacked this principle when other industrial nations used it to advance their own neocolonial export positions.”

Ideology. Having described the U.S. political economy elsewhere (see part 1 in last month's issue), Kolko notes that "neo-Hamiltonian" ideas serve as "a justification for the political capitalism that was the most critical outcome of American liberal reform" in its domestic and overseas dimensions. Interestingly, the relatively non-ideological American military had failed (as of 1969) to rally around this Hamiltonian ideology of "the positive and predatory state." The career of Robert McNamara as a corporate-liberal, technocratic secretary of defense "showed how fully the Military Establishment was merely the instrument of warfare liberalism in the Fair Deal-Great Society period."

World War II

American Non-Diplomacy, 1943–1945. Kolko's *Politics of War* (1968) set out many broad themes that would dominate his later work. U.S. policymakers in 1943–45 found themselves faced with three overriding issues: (1) the global, revolutionary Left; (2) the Soviet Union as a great power and suspected source of all revolutions; and (3) Britain as enemy and rival, mainly because of its sterling bloc and imperial trade preference.

In important respects the real drama began in Italy, where Anglo-American occupation policies set precedents for later occupations: precedents the Soviet Union might exploit as its headlong pursuit of retreating German armies left Soviet forces in possession of Eastern Europe. To keep Italy away from the sterling bloc, Americans elbowed Britain aside, but U.S. and British forces jointly suppressed Italian political activity, disarmed the Resistance, and kept fascist administrators in place, as needed. Britain was promoting France — soon to be liberated — as a phony Great Power subordinate to a projected, British-dominated Western European economic bloc.

The real drama began in Italy, where Anglo-American occupation policies set precedents for later occupations.

Ironically, the French Communist Party, feared by all, had become a patriotic, nationalist bulwark of order. Kolko reasons that if the Soviets (as reputed) controlled the French CP, then Soviet intentions were quite moderate. In Belgium the British repressed the Left. Here was another precedent for the rule *cujus regio, ejus economia* — whose

region, his economy (my phrase). Anglo-American rivalry and their shared suspicion of Soviet intentions affected policies toward every nation about to be occupied by any of the three powers.

Despite Western expectations, the Soviets followed a pragmatic, country-by-country strategy as their armies came westward. In contrast, Kolko writes, “By the end of 1944 both the United States and Great Britain had intervened in the internal affairs of every major Western European nation in order to contain the Left and proscribe each other’s influence, systematically restricting Soviet influence as much as possible while Russia fought the European land war in the theater of central importance.” Underneath mounds of verbiage, then, a *de facto* division of Europe was in the cards from mid-1943, well before anyone ever yelled “Cold War!” The Soviets, willing enough “to leave the Greeks and Yugoslavs to their own fate,” could not afford such luxuries in Poland or Romania.

As of 1944, American strategic planning was shifting from the German to the Soviet menace, but policymakers postponed almost all diplomatic issues, biding their time until U.S. predominance could settle them in America’s favor. Ameri-

can peace plans, from 1941 forward, consisted of: (1) economic goals “inherited almost completely from the world view of Woodrow Wilson”; and (2) improvisation to meet crises and enforce those goals. Goals were “highly explicit in the economic field,” and American reconstruction of the world economy was “by far the most extensively discussed peace aim.”

A *de facto* division of Europe was in the cards from mid-1943, well before anyone ever yelled “Cold War!”

Open doors and raw materials. Throughout *Politics of War* Kolko stresses the centrality of Secretary of State Cordell Hull’s conception of *free trade* as American officials’ chief war aim, aside from bare victory. This “free trade” was of course the famous Open Door policy, which was considered to be a global panacea, and which entailed a very large role for American state power as its motor of progress. As Kolko puts it,

For an international free trade doctrine, the Hullian program, which in principle received the approbation of most business organizations and firms inter-

ested in the subject, seemed to rely much more strongly on the Federal government's active and continuous intervention than Adam Smith's invisible hand, but nearly a century of pragmatic business-government relations had determined the precedent.

As I noted in part 1, Kolko adds American planners' felt need for access to overseas resources and key raw materials to the William Appleman Williams school's emphasis on the Open Door policy for American *exports* of goods and capital. This broadening of the applied Open Door reflected American policymakers' own internal expansion of their operational ideology. A "right" to raw-materials access is a perfect counterpart to a "right" to overseas markets, and from at least May 1944, U.S. policymakers treated American access to raw materials as a self-evident implication "of the Open Door, which originally only meant equality with the most-favored foreign nation rather than [with a target country's] domestic interests."

The Open Door (or equal opportunity everywhere) for American corporate business was the key to U.S. world policy and something

to which the United States would readily sacrifice its professed interest in overseas democracy. If American economic goals had been met, Kolko speculates, the United States could easily have tolerated total Soviet control of Eastern Europe, with that region back in its old, semicolonial economic role and the Russians as middlemen. "Rhetoric aside, expedient references to the Open Door ... functionally meant American economic predominance, often monopoly control, over many of the critical raw materials on which modern industrial power is based." There was little that was truly new in the full use of state power to shape this "free market." With intermediaries like the Saudi oligarchs and the Iranian state on the payroll, America "saw underdeveloped areas primarily as a problem of raw-materials supplies, and that misery and stagnation would be the basis of such an American-led world was of no consequence in American planning for peace."

Conduct of the war. Britain and the United States had long planned what became the terror bombing of World War II. In the Far East the Americans hoped to use both Russia and the atom bomb against Japan. In Kolko's view (*Politics of War*), "The war had so brutalized

the American leaders that burning vast numbers of civilians no longer posed a real predicament by the spring of 1945.” In the end, a “mechanistic attitude” prevailed. For U.S. leaders there was never any moral dilemma about using the new gadget. Elsewhere Kolko writes that, whatever the other side’s systematic inhumanity, “the Allies consistently transgressed traditional legal and ethical standards concerning civilians and war crimes,” and in Korea (1950–1952) the United States departed even farther from those rules.

“The Allies consistently transgressed traditional legal and ethical standards concerning civilians and war crimes.”

Global planning and open doors. The United Nations grew up in the shadow of “the reality that America’s brand of internationalism was truly a plan for its own hegemony in the postwar world” (*Main Currents of American History*). U.S. plans for world monetary reform entailed accelerated trade and turnover, and massive overseas (private and state) lending as a floor under U.S. exports. American policymakers fielded their choicest “anticolonial” rhetoric as leverage in the quest for raw materials. Expected

American control over the UN would make colonial economic resources available to all mankind, but mostly to American corporations. More practically, Washington used the leverage supplied by Lend-Lease and other means to open up the British trade bloc and to deprive Britain of its export markets in Latin America and, in time, its Middle Eastern and Iranian oil fields.

Anatomy of a War

The outcome of all this American effort was the classic Cold War system that “contained” defeated enemies (Germany and Japan) and certain victors (Russia and Britain) under the guise of containing communism. This broad story continues in Kolko’s *Limits of Power*, coauthored with his wife, Joyce Kolko (1972), but here we shall rush ahead into Vietnam, as treated in Kolko’s *Anatomy of a War* (1994 [1985]). In great detail Kolko sketches out the “vast orgy of violence [that] was the product ... of the capital intensive premises of U.S. reliance on fire-power. Officers fought the only war possible and the Vietnamese people paid a monumental price not because of individual caprices but because the United State’s entire military system performed *exactly* as it was intended to” (emphasis added).

Kolko thoroughly discusses the ideology and practice of “the Revolution” (the party in Hanoi and allied forces in South Vietnam) and tensions between them. In North and South alike, those resisting the Saigon government and American forces showed remarkable adaptability in military and economic affairs that belied the top-down Leninist party model.

War, economy, and state

Kolko’s *Century of War* (1994) is a broad study of the impact of modern wars on society and politics. One important conclusion Kolko draws is that “it was not the wisdom of Leninist revolutionaries, much less the glacially paced manifestation of Marxist axioms regarding the economy, but rather the folly of old orders that was the origin of the Left’s greatest political and ideological successes in the twentieth century.” Twentieth-century wars were the clearest expression of this universal ruling-class folly. (As for the war-bred Left, Soviet pragmatic conservatism and the power lust of left-wing leaders in various countries aborted its radical social and nationalist goals.)

World War I was a technology-driven train wreck that irreparably scarred European civilization and

marginalized officer classes everywhere, sidelining their feudal-heroic values and replacing them with technocrats allied with heavy industry. If “stupidity in high places has been the bane of modern history,” Americans leaders — ever surprised, idiotically optimistic — earn special mention.

War, capital, and the state

Kolko’s tour of mankind’s bellicose folly leads him to conclude that conservative, Weberian, and Marxist theories of bureaucracy “gravely distort much of mankind’s past experiences” and leave researchers unable “to fathom the consummately self-destructive irresponsibility of leaders playing with the lives of their subjects and gambling on the very future of their social and political orders.” He sees some kind of radical, humanist exit as needed, but gives only hints in the works surveyed here. Kolko’s historical thought might seem to rest on methodological cynicism and justified anger. It is perhaps better to see it as the product of stark realism and considerable intellectual courage.

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Digging Out

by *Richard W. Fulmer*



Pundits are full of advice about how and how not to pull the country out of its financial morass. Rebuild infrastructure or cut spending, increase deficit spending or reduce the debt, raise or lower taxes, regulate or deregulate, implement a new industrial policy or get government out of the economy, open the monetary floodgates or end the Fed's easy-money policies. Every prescription has its advocates and its detractors. The one thing the experts seem to agree on is that we need "growth," but they disagree on what to grow and how to grow it. Who is right, who is wrong, and why?

Infrastructure

A computer cannot run without its software infrastructure, or "operating system." But decades ago, Apple learned that customers want

more from a personal computer than a great operating system — they want to be able to run lots of great programs. For many years, Apple kept its goose from laying any golden eggs by regulating it to death. The company severely limited the software that could be run on its machines and sealed the computer cases to keep users from tinkering with the hardware. In the end, Apple couldn't compete with Microsoft — despite the latter's inferior operating system — because Microsoft left its software open to both customers and innovators.

Similarly, economies cannot run without infrastructure — roads, bridges, power lines, sewage and water systems, data networks — but it is the people, goods, and information that use that infrastructure which are the real heart of an economy. And if the government regulates goods and services into extinction, no amount of idle, empty infrastructure will keep the economy going.

During the Great Depression the government funded 700,000 miles of new and rebuilt roads along with thousands of bridges, airports, hospitals, schools, and parks. None of this was enough to lift the economy over the economic roadblocks created by the New Deal. The economy recovered only

when World War II ended and interventions such as price and wage controls were abolished.

Regulations issued by the Obama administration in 2012 will cost the country an additional \$216 billion a year.

The postwar recovery shocked Keynesian economists who believed the depression would return with a vengeance when the federal government stopped spending vast sums on munitions and when 10 of the 12 million men and women in uniform came home and flooded the job markets. Instead, the economy, freed of its government-forged shackles, soared even as federal spending plunged from 42 percent of GDP to below 15 percent during the two years following the war.

Austerity

Depending on who is using it, the term “austerity” has different meanings. Typically, however, it translates into reduced government spending and higher taxes with the goal, presumably, of cutting deficits. But the goal during a slump should be to get the economy going again, and as pointed out above, the heart of a nation’s economy is its produc-

tive sector. The first half of the austerity equation, lowering government spending, should free up capital for private industry by reducing government competition for scarce goods and labor. But the second half, higher taxes, prevents industry from employing the freed resources.

Regulation

Michael J. Mandel, chief economic strategist at the Progressive Policy Institute, compares government regulations to pebbles in a stream. As no single pebble will affect the stream’s flow, no single regulation will discourage innovation and economic growth. But throw enough pebbles, and eventually a dam is built. Similarly, “add enough rules, regulations, and requirements,” and investment stalls.

During a 2011 fundraiser in San Francisco, Obama chided the nation: “We have lost our ambition, our imagination, and our willingness to do the things that built the Golden Gate Bridge.” The bridge was built in just over four years between January 1933 and April 1937. Today, new construction projects of all types are routinely delayed for years and sometimes decades as companies hurdle local, state, and federal restrictions.

The Competitive Enterprise Institute calculates that new regulations issued by the Obama administration in 2012 will cost the country an additional \$216 billion a year, bringing the annual total cost of regulation to well over \$1.8 trillion. The economy is increasingly guided by legislation and regulations rather than by market feedback and signals. More and more of industry's resources are expended in navigating political and bureaucratic mazes rather than in serving customers.

Industrial policy ("crony capitalism")

Large companies can typically run through those regulatory mazes more adeptly than can their smaller rivals, and big corporations often lobby Congress to increase regulation in order to gain competitive advantage. Because of such advantages, the high compliance costs of Dodd-Frank and its designation of "systemically important financial institutions" will likely cement "too big to fail" in place.

In Obama's world of activist government, the payouts for congressional lobbying are quickly rising relative to investments in physical and human capital.

Companies have learned that investing in Washington can produce big returns, and some of the

best returns can now be found in the world of "green energy." Despite the failures of companies like Solyndra, Evergreen Solar, SpectraWatt, and Solar Trust, Washington continues to pour billions of tax dollars into solar energy. The power generated by government-subsidized technologies is far more expensive than that produced by their more conventional rivals. Individual and industrial consumers are hurt by the higher prices, the taxes to pay for the subsidies, and the opportunity cost of expending scarce resources and labor on such boondoggles.

Companies have learned that investing in Washington can produce big returns.

Moreover, the government-mandated global warming "solutions" — ethanol, wind, and solar — have likely increased CO₂ emissions. Ethanol production means more farmland and fewer trees. It also means that CO₂, long trapped in the soil, is released into the atmosphere during plowing. Windmills and solar collectors may well take more energy to build, transport, and install than they will ever produce during their useful lives. The main reasons that CO₂ emis-

sions are down in the United States are the economic downturn and a market-driven switch to low-cost natural gas.

As John Mackey states in his book, *Conscious Capitalism: Liberating the Heroic Spirit of Business*,

Crony capitalists and governments have become locked in an unholy embrace, elevating the narrow, self-serving interests of the few over the well-being of the many. They use the coercive power of government to secure advantages not enjoyed by others: regulations that favor them but hinder competitors, laws that prevent market entry, and government-sanctioned cartels.

Instead of expending tax dollars, resources, and labor trying to create industrial winners and losers, Washington would do far better to assume the role of “honest broker,” treating market entrants equally under the rule of law.

Easy money

Over the last few decades, the Federal Reserve has launched a series of boom-and-bust cycles with its inflationary policies. New money enters the economy and creates in-

vestment bubbles. The bubbles burst, and rather than let the markets shift labor and resources into more sustainable areas of production, the Fed pours in still more money. Hoping to lift the economy out of the recession following a bust, the Fed merely creates yet another boom-and-bust cycle.

A country simply doesn't run on small, rectangular pieces of green paper.

Alan Greenspan and his successor, Ben Bernanke, played this same tired game after the dot-com bubble, after 9/11, and after the housing crisis. Now, a series of “quantitative easings” is setting us up for the next bust — perhaps this time in government paper. Rather than a stable economy, the legacy of these serial bubbles has been an unmanageable federal debt and a debased currency.

A country simply doesn't run on small, rectangular pieces of green paper. Ultimately, someone has to actually produce something. But instead of fostering productive investments, the current loose monetary policy seems to be driving investors to purchase hedges against inflation such as gold, silver, platinum, and diamonds.

The New Deal, the new New Deal, and the real deal

Economist Robert Higgs has persuasively argued that the Great Depression was prolonged because uncertainty about federal policy caused investors to sit on their money. Franklin Roosevelt's constant experimentation combined with verbal and legal attacks on businesses and businessmen stifled entrepreneurial risk-taking. Even though a few favored companies became beneficiaries of government largess, overall the business environment remained crushingly hostile.

Obama's administration has echoed Roosevelt's policies during the recent economic downturn, with similar results. Whole industries are being bombarded with taxes, regulations, lawsuits, unstable currency, and verbal attacks, while campaign donors and favored companies re-

ceive bailouts, tax breaks, and grants. The rule of law has been replaced by executive fiat. As a result, capital either sits on the sidelines or flees overseas.

Necessities

Congress and the president must stop the spending that is soaking up goods, services, and labor, and crowding out both consumers and producers; stop the high taxes that are discouraging capital formation; stop trying to pick corporate winners and losers; stop bailing out financial institutions; stop the regulatory machine that is destroying innovation and misdirecting labor and resources; and, most of all, stop manipulating the nation's currency.

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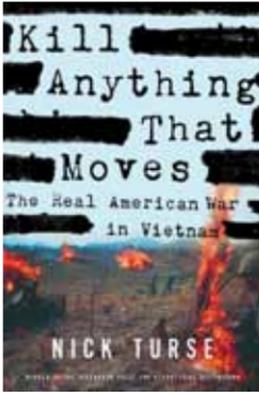
Think of the press as a great keyboard on which the government can play.

— Joseph Goebbels

Revisiting Vietnam

by *Laurence M. Vance*

Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam by Nick Turse (Metropolitan Books, 2013), 386 pages.



The Vietnam War polarized Americans in the 20th century like no other event, dividing the people as no war had since the so-called Civil War a century earlier.

Even though Vietnam was thousands of miles away, had not attacked the United States, and was no threat to the United States, many Americans supported going to war there. Even after all the protests, riots, civil unrest, and campus uprisings, many Americans still wanted the war to continue. Even as the toll

of dead and horribly wounded American soldiers climbed into the tens of thousands, many Americans still favored sending more troops to Vietnam. And even after the release of the Pentagon Papers, the Kent State shooting, and the My Lai massacre, many Americans still supported the war effort.

Yet opposition grew fierce, spawning demonstrations of protest not often seen in modern America.

Passion over the war has not fully abated. To this day some conservatives maintain that if only the U.S. military had dropped more bombs, shot more bullets, flown more sorties, planted more mines, thrown more grenades, employed more attack helicopters, sent more troops, or killed more communists, we would have “won” the war. After all, did not Ronald Reagan say the Vietnam War was “a noble cause”? The critics have not gone away either.

Nick Turse, the author of the powerful and provocative new book *Kill Anything That Moves: The Real American War in Vietnam*, is an award-winning journalist and historian, the managing editor for TomDispatch.com, and a fellow at the Nation Institute. He is the author of the informative work *The Complex: How the Military Invades Our Everyday Lives* (2008).

His latest is one of the most important books about the Vietnam War ever written.

There is no dismissing Turse as some wild-eyed liberal who still hasn't gotten over U.S. involvement in Vietnam. His investigation is groundbreaking, his research painstaking, his documentation meticulous, and his evidence irrefutable. His conclusions are shocking.

My Lai

The title of the book is not Turse's opinion of the conduct of U.S. troops during the war. It comes from the words of Captain Ernest Medina of Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry, the commanding officer of the operation that will be known forever as just My Lai. In March 1968, Charlie Company soldiers visited the village of My Lai and killed everything that moved, including chickens, pigs, cows, water buffalo, and hundreds of unarmed civilians. As described by Turse,

They gunned down old men sitting in their homes and children as they ran for cover. They tossed grenades into homes without even bothering to look inside. An officer grabbed a woman by the hair

and shot her point-blank with a pistol. A woman who came out of her home with a baby in her arms was shot down on the spot. As the tiny child hit the ground, another GI opened up on the infant with his M-16 automatic rifle.

Over four hours, members of Charlie Company methodically slaughtered more than five hundred unarmed victims, killing some in ones and twos, others in small groups, and collecting many more in a drainage ditch that would become an infamous killing ground. They faced no opposition. They even took a quiet break to eat lunch in the midst of the carnage. Along the way, they also raped women and young girls, mutilated the dead, systematically burned homes, and fouled the area's drinking water.

Previous to this, soldiers from Charlie Company had "beat up a villager on a bicycle, assaulted children, and set upon an unarmed woman." Soldiers kicked the woman to death "and emptied their magazines in her head." One soldier, Lt. William Calley, became the low-level fall guy and was the only

soldier convicted in connection with the massacre. He was paroled after serving just 40 months.

Turse tracked down information about “little-known or never-revealed” Vietnam War crimes.

To this day the official position of the U.S. government, as well as those who still defend the war, is that the My Lai massacre was an isolated incident, the work of a few bad apples. Turse debunks the lie that My Lai was a “one-off aberration, rather than part of a consistent pattern of criminality resulting from policies set at the top.” “Atrocities,” says Turse, “were committed by members of every infantry, cavalry, and airborne division, and every separate brigade that deployed without the rest of the division — that is, every major army unit in Vietnam.” The whole war was a series of My Lais; the whole war was a crime.

The “ubiquity of atrocity”

Turse did not set out to write about U.S. war crimes in Vietnam. As a graduate student researching posttraumatic stress disorder among Vietnam veterans, he stumbled on “the first clues to this hidden history almost by accident.” While

he was looking through documents at the National Archives, an archivist directed him to the records of the Vietnam War Crimes Working Group. Turse describes it as “a secret Pentagon task force that had been assembled after the My Lai massacre to ensure that the army would never again be caught off-guard by a major war crimes scandal.” Turse recognized instantly that the records, “which included more than 300 allegations of massacres, murders, rapes, torture, assaults, mutilations, and other atrocities that were substantiated by army investigators,” documented “a nightmare war that is essentially missing from our understanding of the Vietnam conflict.” Reading the files gave him a sense of the “ubiquity of atrocity” that took place during the war.

But Turse’s research didn’t end there. He tracked down more information about “little-known or never-revealed” Vietnam War crimes at the National Archives, submitted Freedom of Information Act requests, made trips to Vietnam, and interviewed on the phone and in person countless generals and top civilian officials, Vietnam veterans (both witnesses and committers of atrocities), and Vietnamese victims. Naturally, Turse was unable to communicate with the 58,195 veterans

whose names appear on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., or the millions of Vietnamese who perished during the conflict.

The format of the book is straightforward. There is an introduction, seven chapters, a brief epilogue, notes, acknowledgments, and an index. Two eight-page sets of photos enhance the book. The 86-page section of notes is one of its strengths.

The book contains enough chilling information to conclude that My Lai "was an operation, not an aberration."

The introduction sets the stage for the book. It contains a description of the My Lai massacre, some basic history of how the U.S. government entangled the country in the war, casualty figures, an account of how the book came to be written, and enough chilling information to conclude that My Lai "was an operation, not an aberration." The seven chapters that follow all seem to run together. This is not a criticism of Turse; it's just that the "daily fact of life throughout the years of the American presence in Vietnam" was

murder; beatings; torture, including waterboarding and

electric shock; rape, including gang rape; sodomy; forced displacement; home burnings; specious arrests; planting of weapons on dead civilians; imprisonment without due process; corpse mutilation; killing and raping of children; point-blank executions; mass killings; dehumanization and humiliation of civilians; repeated aerial bombing and artillery fire on rural populations; aerial spraying of defoliants that wiped out crops; slaughter of animals; using people for target practice; running down civilians with jeeps and trucks, including deliberately crushing people with armored vehicles; destruction of food supplies; sexual exploitation, abuse, violence, and slavery; forced drownings; prisoner abuse and executions; defecating in houses; taking body parts as trophies and souvenirs; mounting Vietnamese heads on poles; lashing corpses to U.S. vehicles; dropping corpses from helicopters.

Turse provides the different names, dates, and places, but the "atrocities were of the same type,

the horrors of a similar magnitude, the miseries of the same degree.”

Origins of a murderous mentality

A number of things Turse discusses contributed to the philosophy of “kill anything that moves.” Three of them took place before a soldier even stepped foot in Vietnam. Basic training emphasized that obedience to commanders was paramount. It was also there that the endless chants of “kill, kill, kill” were uttered and the dehumanization of the Vietnamese as gooks, dinks, slopes, and slants began. Turse mentions the 1971 testimony of Major Gordon Livingston before members of Congress about the ease with which Americans killed Vietnamese: “Above 90 percent of the Americans with whom I had contact in Vietnam treated the Vietnamese as subhuman and with nearly universal contempt.”

Once soldiers arrived in Vietnam, the body count was viewed as the most important measure of success. This was the view from the Pentagon on down through the chain of command. It led to the strategy of shooting first and asking questions later. “If it’s dead and Vietnamese, it’s VC,” became the rule of thumb. Incentives were provided for “grunts” to produce dead

bodies: R&R, medals, badges, extra food, extra beer, permission to wear nonregulation gear, and light duty. It is no wonder that some Americans racked up personal body counts of over a thousand. There were even body-count competitions between different units, with prizes at stake.

Rules of engagement

And then there was the “mere-gook rule,” which meant that “all Vietnamese—northern and southern, adults and children, armed enemy and innocent civilian—were little more than animals, who could be killed or abused at will.”

New military technologies that were easy to use encouraged GIs to fire their weapons for the thrill of it.

Other factors included ineffective rules of engagement that “allowed troops to invent almost any rationale to justify killing.” There were established “free-fire” zones where “you could not be held responsible for firing on innocent civilians since by definition there were none there.” Turse cites a U.S. Senate study which “acknowledged that by 1968 an estimated 300,000 civilians had been killed or wound-

ed in free-fire zones.” Fancy new military technologies that were designed to maim and incapacitate people and were easy to use encouraged GIs to fire their weapons for the thrill of it. The sheer volume of the munitions expended is mind-blowing — close to 30 billion pounds over the course of the war. It’s a wonder there is anything left of Vietnam. Between 1965 and 1968, “thirty-two tons of bombs per hour were dropped on the North.” And more bombs were actually dropped on South Vietnam — America’s ally. Turse maintains that “the amount of ammunition fired per soldier was twenty-six times greater in Vietnam than during World War II.” Between 1965 and 1972, “U.S. and South Vietnamese aircraft flew 3.4 million combat sorties in Southeast Asia.” Turse also mentions the dropping of 400,000 tons of napalm, 379 million M-34 white phosphorus grenades in 1969 alone, and 70 million liters of herbicidal agents like Agent Orange.

U.S. soldiers who raised objections about atrocities were sometimes intimidated or killed. When detailed, reliable atrocity allegations were made known, the military “often tamped down the reports, suppressed investigation findings, or dragged out the cases for as long as

possible.” Nevertheless, in 1966, Marine Corps Lieutenant General Lewis Walt sent a secret communiqué to two top generals: “I am greatly disturbed, as I am sure you are, by the number of serious incidents involving allegations of felonies by Marines against Vietnamese civilians.” And in 1971, an official army investigation of the “Torture of Prisoners of War by U.S. Officers” noted that “violations of Geneva Conventions were ‘widespread’ and that torture by U.S. troops was ‘standard practice.’”

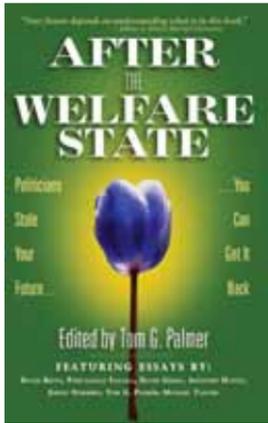
In a victory statement at the end of the Gulf War, George H. W. Bush said, “By God, we’ve kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all!” Perhaps this is so, but the criminal legacy of Vietnam can never be “kicked.” Turse says that “there have been more than 30,000 nonfiction books published on the Vietnam War since the conflict began.” His indispensable book must be placed at the top of the list.

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The Welfare State Exposed

by George C. Leef

After the Welfare State, edited by Tom G. Palmer (Jameson Books, 2012), 180 pages.



Most Americans (indeed, most people in every advanced nation) walk around in a fog of myths and misconceptions concerning the subject of this book — the welfare state. They believe that in the absence of governmental welfare programs, there would be little or no support for the needy. They believe that welfare mainly helps those who are unable to help themselves. Because so many people hold those ideas, politicians find it easy to manipulate

them into supporting an array of programs that look “compassionate” on the surface but are in fact deeply harmful to the nation’s social and economic fabric.

With Tom Palmer’s latest book, the Atlas Economic Research Foundation continues its project of enlightening people as to the benefits of true liberalism, this time by demolishing the mythology surrounding the welfare state. It consists of three essays by Palmer and six by other writers. Any reader who approaches the book with an open mind cannot avoid an awakening to the prodigious damage that governmental welfare programs have done.

In his opening essay, Palmer introduces readers to a key understanding: Governmental welfare is an instance of the tragedy of the commons. Once the government’s treasury is opened to groups seeking benefits — and there is no way to limit access just to supposedly needy groups — the result is certain to be the same as opening up pasture land to every owner of farm animals. The pasture (“the commons”) will be ruined through overuse.

Using a more current commons problem, Palmer explains, “In modern welfare states, everyone has an incentive to act like irresponsible

fishermen who fish out the lake, except that the resource we're plundering is each other." I think his analogy is a brilliant stroke, as it unites a widespread understanding among Americans about a serious environmental problem with the libertarian case against the welfare state. If someone can grasp the harm that's done when pastures are overgrazed or fish stocks are depleted, he should also be able to see the harm from the political free-for-all that occurs when people start to think of the government as a source of wealth.

Massive borrowing to pay for welfare benefits is putting a heavy mortgage on future generations.

Palmer concludes by linking our mounting and evidently irreversible debt accumulation to the welfare state, because the flood of red ink is driven mostly by the promises politicians made in the past to give people "free" money and in-kind benefits. Massive borrowing to pay for welfare benefits (along with other government boondoggles) is putting a heavy mortgage on future generations.

The next two essays concern nations that have been much in the news recently for their economic woes — Italy and Greece.

The decline and fall of the Italian miracle

Piercamillo Falasca's "How the Welfare State Sank the Italian Dream" recounts the political and economic history of Italy following World War II. Americans who read about the condition of Italy today, with huge government debts that put it on the brink of default, probably have no idea that from the late 1940s to the 1960s, Italy was a model of fiscal prudence. In those decades, Italy enjoyed rapid economic growth, because the government intervened very little in the economy. Italians knew that if they wanted to prosper, they had to work and create wealth on their own. From 1946 to 1962, Falasca observes, the average annual rate of economic growth was 7.7 percent — a fabulous performance.

Especially important in this *miracolo economico* was the classical-liberal Italian economist Luigi Einaudi. During that period, government policy was rooted in his beliefs in sound money, free trade, and government nonintervention in the market process.

With that economic success, however, there was also the temptation to divert wealth produced in the private sector to the government for redistribution. In the

1960s the seeds of Italy's current economic malaise were sown as politicians, eager to win support through vicarious generosity, enacted increasingly costly welfare measures and "prolabor" regulations. Among those measures was a national health-care system financed almost entirely through taxation.

Hatzis cites his native Greece as a "precautionary tale" that warns us to avoid the welfare state.

The result was a dramatic change in the country. Economic growth began to decline and now hovers around 2 percent annually. Unemployment has risen steeply, and the government's budget is a sea of red ink. Bad as the economic effects of welfarism have been, Falasca writes, "the deepest consequences of Italy's welfare state ... [are] not economic but cultural. The culture of welfare addiction is what has made change so difficult." That is a crucial point. Once people habituated to government handouts, it became nearly impossible to reverse course to the old days of self-reliance.

Beware of governments bearing gifts

Aristides Hatzis cites his native Greece as a "precautionary tale" that

warns us to avoid the welfare state. Much as was the case in neighboring Italy, after World War II Greece enjoyed steady economic growth despite considerable political instability and rule by a military junta (1967–1974). In 1981, however, the nation elected the socialist party headed by Andreas Papandreou, who envisioned a radically transformed nation — a welfare state with a government-planned economy and cradle-to-grave welfare benefits. The majority liked the promises of an easier life, but the results have proven to be "a deadly mix of a bloated, inefficient welfare state with stifling intervention and overregulation of the private sector," Hatzis writes.

Government spending rose steadily, largely paid for by foreign borrowing. Both the overtly socialist party (known as PASOK) and the ostensibly conservative party bought into the public demand for generous government benefits. The Greeks enjoyed "party time" for a couple of decades, based on the false prosperity of borrowed money. That lasted until lenders began to comprehend that the Greeks were not producing nearly enough wealth to pay back their government's enormous and growing debts. When the money ran out and

the promised benefits couldn't be paid, the result was deadly rioting in the streets.

Especially enlightening is Hatzis's explanation that health care in Greece is very expensive, even though the nation has adopted a government-run system under which care is nominally free. So how can it be expensive? Because medical services are free, there are long waiting lists. To obtain care, people have to resort to bribery. Americans should learn from the Greeks and their unhappy experience.

Palmer connects Bismarck's scheme for using welfare to control the German people with modern welfare in America.

Where does the welfare state have its roots? Palmer explains in his next essay that they are found in Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's Germany. Bismarck, who wanted to expand and solidify the power of the German state, fought with German classical liberals who wanted peace, free trade, and liberty for the people. Bismarck understood that the liberal vision blocked his goal of a mighty, dominating nation. To make the mass of the population feel dependent on the government (and therefore supportive of it), he

pushed through social-insurance measures covering accidents, disability, and old age.

Bismarck got his powerful Germany, and the masses did indeed support it. If he had failed and Germany had instead remained a collection of small, liberal, peaceful states, the world might have been spared the horrors of the two world wars, Nazi genocide, and Communism.

Palmer connects Bismarck's scheme for using welfare to control the German people with modern welfare in America:

The welfare state is not merely a collection of discrete and unconnected income transfer programs; it is a coherent political strategy, entailing harmful restrictions on the ability of the poor to improve their lot (to protect privileged groups from having to compete with them), coupled with income subsidies to partially compensate the poor for those grievous harms. The very politicians who portray themselves as friends of the poor when they distribute food subsidies to them, are the very same politicians who vote to keep food prices high by mandating floor prices.

Thus we see that welfare is not really aimed at helping poor people. It is aimed at making them compliant, thoughtless supporters of the politicians who claim to be their saviors. Palmer concludes that the welfare state “is a mixture of wishful thinking and outright lies.” Couldn’t it be replaced with better, voluntary institutions?

Mutual aid

The next two essays answer that question in the affirmative. In “The Evolution of Mutual Aid,” David Green explores the history of voluntary (or “friendly”) societies in England. Those societies arose without any coercion as individuals combined their resources to improve security for all members. They provided medical care, death and disability benefits, and losses due to shipwrecks. People could join or leave the societies as they chose. Government played no role in them, leaving the members free to search for the optimal rules and procedures. Before the passage of the government’s National Insurance Act in 1911, a large and growing percentage of the British population was protected by a “safety net” constructed entirely from the voluntary efforts of those societies.

Green’s essay is followed by history professor David Beito’s, which focuses on the American experience with similar mutual-aid societies. “Only churches rivaled fraternal societies as providers of social welfare before the advent of the welfare state,” Beito writes. “In 1920, about eighteen million Americans belonged to fraternal societies, nearly thirty percent of all adults over the age of 20.” Among other services, those societies made medical care readily available to their members. Long before politicians conceived of “single-payer” health care (that is, a government monopoly) millions of poor people were able to get care by joining one of the many societies.

David Beito’s essay focuses on the American experience with mutual-aid societies.

In fact, there were so many doctors with contracts to provide services for members that state medical associations began attacking the supposed evil of “lodge practice” because they saw it as a threat to the fee-for-service model that traditional practitioners favored. (Unfortunately, Beito reports, those attacks were successful, another of the many instances where powerful in-

terest groups have used the power of government to stifle competition.)

A crucial point about the operation of the societies is that they had to guard against moral hazard. With limited resources and no power to tax, they had to find ways to keep members from claiming benefits when they were not warranted. Beito argues that they were quite successful in doing so and were far more effective than government officials at detecting malingering.

The promised benefits of welfare programs are far beyond what the state can possibly pay.

Fraternal societies were also important in helping immigrants. Their success in that, however, actually irritated “progressives” like Teddy Roosevelt, Beito writes. Roosevelt argued that the societies were doing — voluntarily — what he thought “the people” should be doing. In other words, he disliked the fact that private action was working where he thought the coercive hand of the state should operate. (Bismarck and Teddy had a lot in common.)

Concluding, Beito maintains that the fraternal societies helped to equip their members with traits of independence, self-reliance, and

foresight, whereas welfare programs undermined those virtues.

Beyond any doubt, the poor were better off with voluntary institutions than with government welfare programs. The big question is how to return to voluntarism.

American disasters

In his essay, “The Welfare State as a Pyramid Scheme,” Michael Tanner shows that the promised benefits of welfare programs are far beyond what the state can possibly pay. They are pyramid schemes in that the early participants get a handsome return on their money at the expense of later participants. Eventually the pyramid must collapse, because no wealth is created to pay for all the promises. Both in Europe and the United States, the welfare benefits coming due in approaching decades will overwhelm the ability of governments to pay them. If that truth becomes widely understood, it may be possible to shift the responsibility for welfare from the state to civil society.

An important, if somewhat tangential, contribution is Johan Norberg’s essay in which he shows that the housing bubble was due to government policies, not excesses of greed in deregulated markets, as many statist apologists have said.

The bubble, which inflicted so much damage on individuals and institutions when it burst, was an offshoot of the welfare-state mentality that government must intervene to help people get the things supposedly necessary for a good life. Norberg's point is that we should leave housing to the free market, just as we should leave food, medical care, and other essentials to it.

Palmer's final essay, "Poverty, Morality, and Liberty," brings the book to a grand close, like the coda to a great symphony. Welfare-state advocates, he shows, have long taken advantage of popular misconceptions to persuade people that we must abandon *laissez faire* and embrace the authoritarian welfare state out of compassion for the poor. They have created a false picture of idyllic life prior to the advent of capitalism and an equally false picture of misery for ordinary people

caused by capitalism. The truth is that capitalism, combined with voluntary associations and charitable organizations, led to tremendous increases in standards of living for everyone. And on the other hand, government interference with capitalism and the plethora of welfare programs have slowed economic progress and created a destructive culture of dependency that gravely harms the poor.

Do you want to help fight poverty? Then I suggest getting many copies of *After the Welfare State* (Atlas sells copies inexpensively, or you can just download the book for free) and giving them to every thinking person you know.

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