

Beware America: From Boston to Ferguson to Charlottesville, The Evolution of a Police State

by John W. Whitehead via glenn - ICH *Friday, Aug 17 2018, 4:49am*

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“It takes a remarkable force to keep nearly a million people quietly indoors for an entire day, home from work and school, from neighborhood errands and out-of-town travel. It takes a remarkable force to keep businesses closed and cars off the road, to keep playgrounds empty and porches unused across a densely populated place 125 square miles in size. This happened ... not because armed officers went door-to-door, or imposed a curfew, or threatened martial law. All around the region, for 13 hours, people locked up their businesses and ‘sheltered in place’ out of a kind of collective will. The force that kept them there wasn’t external - there was virtually no active enforcement across the city of the governor’s plea that people stay indoors. Rather, the pressure was an [internal](#) one - expressed as concern, or helpfulness, or in some cases, fear - felt in thousands of individual homes.”—Journalist Emily Badger, “The Psychology of a Citywide Lockdown”

It has become way too easy to lockdown this nation.

Five years ago, the city of [Boston](#) was locked down while police carried out a military-style manhunt for suspects in the 2013 Boston Marathon explosion.

Four years ago, the city of [Ferguson](#), Missouri, was locked down, with government officials deploying a massive SWAT team, an armored personnel carrier, men in camouflage pointing heavy artillery at the crowd, smoke bombs and tear gas to quell citizen unrest over a police shooting of a young, unarmed black man.

Three years ago, the city of [Baltimore](#) was put under a military-enforced lockdown after civil unrest over police brutality erupted into rioting. More than 1,500 national guard troops were deployed while residents were ordered to stay inside their homes and put under a 10 pm curfew.

This year, it was my hometown of [Charlottesville](#), Va., population 50,000, that was locked down while government officials declared a state of emergency and enacted heightened security measures tantamount to martial law, despite the absence of any publicized information about credible threats to public safety.

As Tess Owen [reports](#) for Vice:

One year after white supremacists paraded through the streets, the face of downtown Charlottesville was transformed once again - this time with checkpoints, https://news.vice.com/en_us/article/zmk8e9/charlottesville-on-lockdown-this-city-has-been-changed-forever military-style camps for National Guard, and state police on every corner. When residents woke up Saturday, all entrances to the downtown mall were blocked off, apart from two checkpoints, where police looked through people’s bags for lighters, knives or any other weapons. Up above, standing atop a building site, two national guard members photographed the individuals coming in and out... A National Guard encampment was set up in McGuffey Park, between the children’s playground and

the basketball court, where about 20 military police officers in camouflage were snoozing in the shade of some trees. A similar encampment was set up a few blocks away.

More details from journalist Ned Oliver:

[Downtown Charlottesville](#) felt like the green zone of a war-torn city Saturday. More than a thousand local and state police officers barricaded 10 blocks of the city's popular pedestrian district, the Downtown Mall, to prepare for the one-year anniversary of the white supremacist rally last year that left dozens injured and one dead. To enter, people had to submit to bag checks and searches at one of two checkpoints... Preparations aside, unlike last year, no white supremacist groups had said they were going to visit the city, and, by week's end, none had. Instead, it was a normal day on the mall except for the heavy security, a military helicopter constantly circling overhead, and hundreds of police officers milling around.

Make no mistake, this was a militarized exercise in intimidation, and it worked only too well.

For the most part, the residents of this city—once home to Thomas Jefferson, the nation's third president, author of the Declaration of Independence, and champion of the Bill of Rights—welcomed the city-wide lockdown, the invasion of their privacy, and the dismantling of every constitutional right intended to serve as a bulwark against government abuses.

Yet for those like myself who have studied emerging police states, the sight of any American city placed under martial law—its citizens essentially under house arrest (officials used the Orwellian phrase “shelter in place” in Boston to describe the mandatory lockdown), military-style helicopters equipped with thermal imaging devices buzzing the skies, tanks and armored vehicles on the streets, and snipers perched on rooftops, while thousands of black-garbed police swarmed the streets and SWAT teams carried out house-to-house searches—leaves us in a growing state of unease.

Watching the events of the lockdown unfold, I couldn't help but think of Nazi Field Marshal Hermann Goering's remarks during the Nuremberg trials. As Goering noted:

It is always a simple matter to drag people along whether it is a democracy, or a fascist dictatorship, or a parliament, or a communist dictatorship. Voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. This is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked, and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same in every country.

As the events in Charlottesville have made clear, it does indeed work the same in every country.

Whatever the threat to so-called security—whether it's civil unrest, school shootings, or alleged acts of terrorism—government officials will capitalize on the nation's heightened emotions, confusion and fear as a means of extending the reach of the police state.

These troubling developments are the outward manifestations of an inner, philosophical shift underway in how the government views not only the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, but “we the people,” as well.

What this reflects is a move away from a government bound by the rule of law to one that seeks total control through the imposition of its own self-serving laws on the populace.

Unfortunately, it doesn't take much for the American people to march in lockstep with the government's dictates, even if it means submitting to martial law, having their homes searched, and being stripped of one's constitutional rights at a moment's notice.

In Charlottesville, most of the community fell in line, except for one gun-toting, disabled, 71-year-old war veteran who was arrested for purchasing cans of Arizona iced tea, a can of bug spray and razor blades, all of which were on the City's list of temporarily prohibited, potentially "dangerous" items. Incidentally, the veteran's guns (not among the list of prohibited items) caused no alarm.

Talk about draconian.

This continual undermining of the rules that protect civil liberties will inevitably have far-reaching consequences on a populace that not only remains ignorant about their rights but is inclined to sacrifice their liberties for phantom promises of safety.

Be warned: these lockdowns are just a precursor to full-blown martial law.

The powers-that-be want us acclimated to the sights and sounds of a city-wide lockdown with tanks in the streets, military encampments in cities, Blackhawk helicopters and armed drones patrolling overhead.

They want us to accept the fact that in the American police state, we are all potentially guilty, all potential criminals, all suspects waiting to be accused of a crime.

They want us to be meek and submissive.

They want us to report on each other.

They want us to be grateful to the standing armies for their so-called protection.

They want us to self-censor our speech, self-limit our movements, and police ourselves.

As Glenn Greenwald notes in *The Intercept*:

"Americans are now so accustomed to seeing police officers decked in camouflage and Robocop-style costumes, riding in armored vehicles and carrying automatic weapons first introduced during the U.S. occupation of Baghdad, that it has become normalized... The dangers of domestic militarization are both numerous and manifest. To begin with... it degrades the mentality of police forces in virtually every negative way and subjects their targeted communities to rampant brutality and unaccountable abuse... Police militarization also poses grave and direct dangers to basic political liberties, including rights of free speech, press and assembly."

Make no mistake: these are the hallmarks of a military occupation.

Militarized police. Riot squads. Camouflage gear. Black uniforms. Armored vehicles. Mass arrests. Pepper spray. Tear gas. Batons. Strip searches. Surveillance cameras. Kevlar vests. Drones. Lethal weapons. Less-than-lethal weapons unleashed with deadly force. Rubber bullets. Water cannons. Stun grenades. Arrests of journalists. Crowd control tactics. Intimidation tactics. Brutality.

We are already under martial law, held at gunpoint by a standing army.

Take a look at the pictures from Charlottesville, from Baltimore, from Ferguson and from Boston, and then try to persuade yourself that this is what freedom in America is supposed to look like.

A standing army—something that propelled the early colonists into revolution—strips the American people of any vestige of freedom.

It was for this reason that those who established America vested control of the military in a civilian government, with a civilian commander-in-chief. They did not want a military government, ruled by force. Rather, they opted for a republic bound by the rule of law: the U.S. Constitution.

Unfortunately, with the Constitution under constant attack, the military's power, influence and authority have grown dramatically. Even the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878, which makes it a crime for the government to use the military to carry out arrests, searches, seizure of evidence and other activities normally handled by a civilian police force, was greatly weakened by both Barack Obama and George W. Bush, who ushered in exemptions allowing troops to deploy domestically and arrest civilians in the wake of alleged terrorist acts.

Now we find ourselves struggling to retain some semblance of freedom in the face of police and law enforcement agencies that look and act like the military and have just as little regard for the Fourth Amendment, laws such as the NDAA that allow the military to arrest and indefinitely detain American citizens, and military drills that acclimate the American people to the sight of armored tanks in the streets, military encampments in cities, and combat aircraft patrolling overhead.

We've already gone too far down this road.

Add these lockdowns onto the list of other troubling developments that have taken place over the past 30 years or more, and the picture grows even more troubling: the expansion of the military industrial complex and its influence in Washington DC, the rampant surveillance, the corporate-funded elections and revolving door between lobbyists and elected officials, the militarized police, the loss of our freedoms, the injustice of the courts, the privatized prisons, the school lockdowns, the roadside strip searches, the military drills on domestic soil, the fusion centers and the simultaneous fusing of every branch of law enforcement (federal, state and local), the stockpiling of ammunition by various government agencies, the active shooter drills that are indistinguishable from actual crises, the economy flirting with near collapse, etc.

Suddenly, the overall picture seems that much more sinister.

The lesson for the rest of us is this: once a free people allows the government to make inroads into their freedoms or uses those same freedoms as bargaining chips for security, it quickly becomes a slippery slope to outright tyranny. And it doesn't really matter whether it's a Democrat or a Republican at the helm, because the bureaucratic mindset on both sides of the aisle now seems to embody the same philosophy of authoritarian government.

Remember, a police state does not come about overnight.

It starts small, perhaps with a revenue-generating red light camera at an intersection.

When that is implemented without opposition, perhaps next will be surveillance cameras on public streets. License plate readers on police cruisers. More police officers on the beat. Free military equipment from the federal government. Free speech zones and zero tolerance policies and curfews. SWAT team raids. Drones flying overhead. City-wide lockdowns.

No matter how it starts, however, it always ends the same.

Remember, it's a slippery slope from a questionable infringement justified in the name of safety to all-out tyranny.

These are no longer warning signs of a steadily encroaching police state, the police state has arrived.

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