

Insanity Defense - US Presidential Dictatorship

By Chris Floyd
The Moscow Times
7-1-6

That the United States, once touted as the world's greatest democracy, is now ruled by a presidential dictatorship is a fact beyond any serious dispute. Indeed, the nation's political establishment seems to have accepted this revolutionary system with remarkable docility, even as its lineaments are further exposed week by week. The Bush administration no longer bothers to hide the novel theory of government that undergirds its coup, but declares it openly, in court, in Congress, everywhere.

The theory holds that the president has the arbitrary right to ignore any law that he feels is an unconstitutional infringement of his power -- and a law is automatically unconstitutional if the president feels it infringes on his power. This neatly squared circle makes Congress irrelevant and removes the judiciary from the loop altogether. Thus, the only effective instrument of power left in the land is the "unitary executive": the fancy modern name that the legal minions of President George W. Bush have given to the ancient concept of "tyranny."

The true nature of this presidential dictatorship has been laid bare in a harrowing new book from reporter Ron Suskind, "The One Percent Doctrine." Suskind, who once coaxed the regime's defining ethos from an arrogant Bushist -- "We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality" -- paints a portrait of an administration drunk on lawless power, a junta operated from the shadows by the grim and literally heart-dead husk called Vice President Dick Cheney and his long-time companion in skulduggery, Defense Secretary Don Rumsfeld.

As Suskind notes, it was Cheney who enunciated the certifiably paranoid principle that governs the regime's behavior: If there is even a 1 percent chance that some state or group might do serious harm to the United States, then America must respond as if that threat were a certainty -- with full force, pre-emptively. Facts, truth, law are unimportant; the only thing that matters is the projection of unchallengeable power. "It's not about our analysis, or finding a preponderance of evidence," Cheney said. "It's about our response."

This is plainly madness. Whether the insanity of the "doctrine" is genuine -- i.e., a pathological panic reaction by gutless, pampered fat-cats scared of the slightest murmur from the dusky tribes out there, beyond the iron gates and razor wire of privilege -- or if, more likely, it is simply the chosen rationalization for a gang of predators tired of the few restraints that constitutional government has placed on their lust for loot and domination, the end result is the same: The most powerful country in the history of the world is being run by moral degenerates in thrall to a lunatic policy.

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Email the Opinion Page Editor Suskind's book is full of chilling passages, such as one about the pointless tortures inflicted, at Bush's explicit suggestion, on Abu Zubaydah, a mentally ill al-Qaida flunky. His capture in March 2002 was trumpeted as a "major victory" in the war on terror, the bagging of a "top terrorist operative." But interrogators quickly realized that he was just a low-level factotum with multiple personality disorder and no knowledge of al-Qaida operations or strategy.

So the administration had to create another reality. Told that Zubaydah had revealed nothing of value under ordinary interrogation, Bush first whined to CIA boss George Tenet ("You're not gonna make me lose face on this, are ya?"), then pointedly asked: "So, do these harsh techniques work?" He was referring to the "torture memos" drawn up at his order by the White House legal team -- Machiavellian documents which declared that anything less than deliberate murder or permanent maiming should no longer be regarded as torture, The Washington Post reports.

Bush's sinister nod and wink were clearly understood. The wretched Zubaydah was "waterboarded," beaten repeatedly and threatened with death. He was battered with white noise and deprived of sleep, and his medication was taken away. His broken mind snapped completely. He began spewing out whatever his tormentors wanted to hear, fantastic tales of plots aimed at targets all over America -- meat for countless "terror alerts" whenever the political situation called for a nice, juicy scare to goose the rubes.

But perhaps the most revealing moment in Suskind's book is a brief vignette that captures the quintessence of Bush's callous disregard for the American people -- and the regime's strange, preternatural calm in the face of imminent attack. In August 2001, while Bush dawdled on his Texas dude ranch, the entire national security system was, in

Tenet's words, "blinking red" in expectation of a major terrorist strike. On Aug. 6, a CIA official brought the infamous "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S." memo to Crawford and read it out personally to the president. In response, he got nothing but a snide dismissal: "All right, you've covered your ass now."

That was it. Bush had nothing else to say about this stark threat of impending slaughter. He had no questions, no advice, no commands -- just smirking contempt. Even if we give Bush every benefit of the doubt, even if we put the most charitable construction possible on his behavior, the very best you could say of his reaction is that it represents a blood-curdling degree of depraved indifference and criminal negligence worthy of Nero.

Beyond this "best-case" scenario, you tumble into an abyss of ever-darker implications, a deep murk that may never be dispelled. But what we know, what is plain as day, is bad enough: Tyranny has come -- aggressive, remorseless, murderous, mad.

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