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Why They Won't Impeach

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Why do the Democrats, with control of both the House and Senate since last year's elections, continue to twiddle their thumbs over the policies and practices of a corrupt president? Yes, they did spearhead a bill through the House that requires a withdrawal of troops from Iraq by April, 2008, a measure that media propagandists dutifully offered as having some significance. But those who take the time to carefully read legislation realize that this was but another empty, cynical gesture; the latest expression of "bipartisan" meaninglessness designed solely to placate an increasingly disgruntled booboisie. Even in the unlikelihood of the bill being signed by the president – assuming a similar proposal passes the Senate – there does not appear to be sufficient Congressional support for it to override his veto.

But Mr. Bush's signing or non-signing of such legislation would not restrain his continuing the mayhem and slaughter visited upon Iraqis who do not fully appreciate their "liberation." The bill contains a number of provisos, such as the keeping of a sufficient number of soldiers to help train Iraqi troops, to protect U.S. government properties, and to fight terrorists. The judgment as to when such conditions exist, and what numbers of troops would be necessary to deal with such problems, would, of course, remain in the hands of Mr. Bush. In other words, this bill would leave the president in precisely the same position he now enjoys, with this added benefit: he could rationalize his policies in terms of carrying out the express will of Congress!

Serious critics of both Mr. Bush and the Democrats ask why the latter do not undertake the impeachment of the former. Nancy Pelosi, whose every word and gesture belie the allegedly oppositional role of the Democrats, announced, immediately after the 2006 election results, that the impeachment of Mr. Bush was not a matter the Democrats would pursue with their newly-gained power. "Why not?", many asked, particularly since Congress had been eager to impeach Bill Clinton for his far-lesser offenses. Should a man who lied America into an unprovoked, criminal attack that has thus far produced a million deaths, be more favorably treated than a man who lied about his sexual behavior in the White House? The few intelligent minds remaining in this intellectually benumbed society continue to ask this question.

If one takes the trouble to examine the matter from the perspective of the machinations that dominate all political behavior, the answer becomes apparent. Though Republicans and Democrats have their personal and minor policy differences, they are in agreement on one basic point: their "bipartisan" support for the preservation and aggrandizement of the power of the state. They understand – as do members of the mainstream media – that their principal obligation is to serve the well-being of the political power structure that long ago laid uncontested claim to the ownership of modern society.

The interests of Democratic and Republican officials alike are best served by the maximization of political power. If "government" is defined as an agency enjoying a monopoly on the lawful use of force within a given territory, what politically ambitious person would not want to enjoy as much of that power as he or she can muster? And since such a purpose not only suits the interests of the ruling establishment, but defines its existence, a symbiotic relationship between these two groups is easily fashioned.

Because the state and its de facto owners thrive on the exercise of force, any circumstance that *enhances* the power of government will be embraced and eagerly pursued. This is the meaning behind Randolph Bourne's classic observation that "war is the health of the state." It also explains the well-orchestrated fervor over global warming or any other dire threat du jour. Likewise, anything that *diminishes* state power will be resisted by all who have a vested interest in the exercise of such authority. At its base, this is what accounts for the refusal of the political establishment and its news media to acknowledge the existence of Ron Paul's candidacy. Paul is persona non grata to these forces for one reason alone: his insistence upon drastically reducing state power.

Because, as Acton reminded us, power is a corrupting influence and, as such, its excesses can dissipate the public sanction upon which its continued exercise depends, the state must occasionally perform cosmetic surgery upon itself in order to restore its image. Thus, civil liberties groups may be successful in getting the courts to enjoin some minor prohibition (e.g., a statute criminalizing flag-burning), not out of any innate defense of individual liberty, but to create the appearance that the state is a force that can be tamed by a reasoned dedication to principle. In such ways does Boobus Americanus get lulled into the passive mindset that allows state power to retain its popular image as a latent but controllable system.

But what events or conditions are appropriate for this cathartic exercise? If there is a growing popular disaffection for governmental excesses, to what ritualistic remedies might the establishment resort without, in the process, posing a threat to the power base upon which it is dependent? The exercise of monopoly powers can often prove embarrassing to the state which must, for the sake of not looking foolish or unprincipled, resort to superficial hygienic measures.

When Bill Clinton's social life became an embarrassment to the establishment, his impeachment had the aforementioned cleansing consequences without, in the process, threatening the power structure. Lying about one's sexual behavior – particularly when conducted in the inner sanctum of state power (i.e., the Oval Office) – is not an activity that is either essential to, or enhances, the exercise of state power. Thus, Clinton could be impeached, and public respect for the presidency restored without, in the process, depleting the coercive authority of the state. For the same reason can the likes of “Scooter” Libby, Lynndie England, Jack Abramoff, et al., be offered up in sacrifice to the purgative needs of the state.

The Iraq war – both as to its genesis and conduct – has likewise proven an embarrassment to the established order. The lies, deception, forged documents, and corporate-state financial corruption that have defined this undertaking, have sent public respect for President Bush as well as Congress into free-fall. The state cannot long endure such humiliation. But what can be done about it? Impeaching Bill Clinton was relatively easy, because state power was not threatened in any way. But in the case of George W., *his* malefactions go to the essence of power. He has dismantled any semblance of constitutional government, with its “separation of powers,” into a “unitary presidency” which, in any other society, would correctly be labeled a “dictatorship.” Nor does Mr. Bush make any pretense to the contrary, referring to himself as “the decider” and having, on more than one occasion, expressed his preference for a dictatorship, “just so long as I'm the dictator.”

President Bush feels not the least bit constrained by such niceties as the Bill of Rights, nor of the power of Congress to legislate regarding matters of which he disapproves. He will sign legislation and then state his intentions to selectively enforce, or to ignore altogether, statutory provisions enacted by Congress. He has also announced his intentions to attack – with nuclear weapons, should he desire to use them – any nation he has unilaterally selected as “terrorist.” Should even the slightest squeak of protest be offered to his despotic practices, he will play to the peanut gallery by invoking “the troops,” or “terrorism,” or the phrase that his would-be successor, Rudy Giuliani, has made the entirety of his campaign: “9/11.” He has elevated himself, with little or no objection from most Americans, to the status Louis XIV once declared of himself: “I am the state.”

Don't think that any of this has gone unnoticed or unappreciated by either the owners of the political apparatus, or the politicians and government officials who are allowed to play on it. With only token objection, Mr. Bush has greatly expanded the exercise of arbitrary, unrestrained executive power and, in so doing, ended any pretense of a system of constitutionally-defined government. With the idea of an imperial presidency so readily accepted by most Americans, the owners and managers of the political order are reluctant to advocate any actions that might threaten this newly-gained source of power.

We have already seen, in the so-called Republican “debates,” how eager so many of their presidential hopefuls are to emulate the war-making practices of Mr. Bush. Nor do most of the Democrats show any dispositions for a restrained American state. I can imagine Al Gore drooling over the prospects of becoming “the decider” of matters related to global warming, or Hillary Clinton envisioning herself as the “dictator” of health care to the American people.

The thought of impeaching Mr. Bush thus poses a major dilemma to all members of the political establishment. If the deceit, corruption, criminality, and downright stupidity of his administration have so embarrassed the system as to endanger its continued approval, is it possible to rehabilitate its image by any means short of impeachment? But since his impeachment would necessarily implicate the over-grasping for power that the rest of the political order would love to exercise on behalf of their own ambitions, dare any such hearings be undertaken?

Thomas Jefferson got it right when, in 1819, he observed: “Experience has already shown that the impeachment the Constitution has provided is not even a scarecrow.” Those who seek or want to hold onto their existing power are not about to condemn the man who has done so much to extend its reach.


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