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## Fascism Is Coming Alive Again

BY ERIC MARGOLIS

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The wildly exaggerated threat of so-called Islamic terrorism is being shamelessly used by some western governments to boost their flagging fortunes at a time of economic malaise.

Marketing fear is a sure-fire political ploy, as the Bush administration showed. But if you think promotion of “terrorism” hysteria in order to curtail democratic freedoms is something new, have a look at Germany, 1933.

In that year, Germany’s democratic Weimar republic was foundering under economic depression, mass unemployment and raging hyper-inflation. The Reichstag, or parliament, was deadlocked between bitterly feuding parties, including the minority National Socialists, led by Adolf Hitler, the Catholics, Socialists, and Communists.

In Berlin, on the night of February 23, 1933, the Reichstag was burned down by a massive fire set by an arsonist. A young Dutch Communist found on the premises was charged with the arson attack. Germany was outraged and horrified by the crime – as much as was America after 9/11.

The Communists, of course, quickly blamed the National Socialists (or Nazis, for short). But the most likely culprit was indeed the Dutch Communist.

Five days later, Weimar President Paul Hindenberg, a conservative and war hero, signed a new act known as the Reichstag Fire Decree that suspended free speech and assembly and many legal protections. It gave government the right to arrest “terrorists” under a state of emergency.

In early March, Hitler promulgated the Enabling Act that used the threat of so-called “terrorism” to give him virtual dictatorial powers. This coup was made possible by the support of the conservative Catholic Party which, having seen the slaughter of Catholics in Russia and Ukraine by Communists, decided the Nazis were a lesser evil than the Communists.

A few weeks later, arrests of Socialists, Communists and Jews began. Hitler had come to near absolute power by democratic means thanks to national hysteria and fear over so-called terrorism, an utterly meaningless but evocative propaganda term.

The Weimar republic was swept away – perfectly legally – within months. Germans, stampeded by claims of “terrorism,” disgusted by their politicians, did not mourn Weimar.

Today, we see a number of western democratic governments using some of these same shameless scare tactics to drive their nations to the right and, in some cases, keep their leaders in power.

The Charlie Hebdo spectacle in Paris was an egregious example. Before the Paris shootings, bedraggled President Francois Holland’s popularity rates had fallen to a microscopic 8%. After the giant “free speech” jamboree in Paris, his ratings have skyrocketed to close to 50%. In the case of France, “free speech” meant the right to attack and mock Muslims.

Isolated criminal acts by mentally unhinged men in Canada, Denmark, and Australia were similarly inflated into massive national scares that boosted previously unpopular governments assailed by economic problems. So too were “plots” concocted by security police using dimwits or youngsters. Just as al-Qaida fear was fizzling out, along came ISIS to scare the daylights out of westerners.

We must be very careful. Islamophobia and terror hysteria fit worryingly into the template created by former Columbia University Professor Robert Paxton in his brilliant analysis, “The Anatomy of Fascism.”

Paxton sharply defines fascism, a dreadfully over and misused term, as distinct from conservative regimes. For example, he terms 1930's Italy and Germany as Fascist states, but Franco's Spain as conservative.

Hallmarks of fascism:

- “a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond reach of any traditional solutions;
- belief that one's group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action without legal or moral limits, against its internal and external foes;
- need for authority by natural leaders (always male) culminating in a national chief who alone is capable of incarnating the group's destiny; and superiority of his instincts over abstract and universal reason.”

Other traits of Fascism: militarism and historical triumphalism; glorification of war as a purification and nation-building process.

Intense propaganda about inflated military “heroes.” Sending small numbers of troops or warplanes to fight or bomb miscreant Arabs in the Mideast is a reliable Viagra for small nations with feeble military budgets.

If patriotism and nationalism are the last refuge of scoundrels, they are also the first platform of fools.

We see the right demonizing enemies who supposedly threaten the entire nation, be they anarchists, socialists, Masons, communists, Jews, or Muslims. Purging the media of free-thinking journalists is a basic step. This has happened in the US and Canada.

In Paxton's words, “mobilizing passions...form the emotional lava that set Fascism's foundations.” To see this, just look at fans of Clint Eastwood's loathsome “American Sniper” film. A fascist fiesta for low-IQ Americans.

ISIS is another example of a small but murderous group whose reach and danger has been wildly hyper-inflated for western domestic political reasons. Fanatical, adept at public relations and social media, ISIS has stolen the limelight from al-Qaida and gladdened the hearts of western militarists, hard rightists, and arms makers.

In fact, ISIS appears to go out of its way to make itself hateful and repulsive to westerners. But the danger it poses outside the Mideast is so far negligible. Before we launch any more crusades against ISIS, let's be aware that this bunch of killers originated in the US-run Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq and was primarily financed by Saudis. ISIS thrives in the chaos and ruins caused by George W. Bush's illegal invasion of Iraq and later campaign to subvert Syria.

George W. Bush was re-elected thanks to Midwestern soccer moms who feared Osama bin Laden was about to swoop down from the Hindu Kush and make off with their little Johnnies.

Something similar is happening again in North America, Australia and New Zealand. Many fear ISIS is outside Peoria or Winnipeg. Scared people readily accept dictators.