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Trump's America is a Constitution-Free Zone

By John W. Whitehead
April 27, 2017

“Policing is broken... It has evolved as a paramilitary, bureaucratic, organizational arrangement that distances police officers from the communities they’ve been sworn to protect and serve. When we have shooting after shooting after shooting that most people would define as at least questionable, it’s time to look, not just at a few bad apples, but the barrel. And I’m convinced that it is the barrel that is rotted.”

— Norm Stamper, former Seattle police chief

Please.

Somebody give Attorney General Jeff Sessions a copy of the Constitution.

And while you’re at it, get a copy to President Trump, too.

In fact, you might want to share a copy with the nation’s police officers, as well.

I have my doubts that any of these individuals—all of whom swore to uphold and defend the Constitution—have ever read any of the nation’s founding documents.

Had they actually read and *understood* the Declaration of Independence, Constitution and Bill of Rights, there would be no militarized police, no mass surveillance, no police shootings of unarmed individuals, no SWAT team raids, no tasing of children, no asset forfeiture schemes or any of the other government-sanctioned abuses that get passed off as law and order these days.

We've got serious problems in this country, and they won't be solved on the golf course, by wining and dining corporate CEOs, giving local police forces more military equipment, locking down the nation, or pretending that the only threats to our freedoms are posed by forces beyond our borders or by "anti-government" extremists hiding among us.

So far, Trump's first 100 days in office have been no different from Obama's last 100 days, at least when it comes to the government's ongoing war on our freedoms.

Government corruption remains at an all-time high.

Police shootings and misconduct have continued unabated.

The nation's endless wars continue to push us to the brink of financial ruin.

And "we the people" are still being treated as if we have no rights, are entitled to no protections, and exist solely for the purpose of sustaining the American police state with our hard-earned tax dollars.

Just take the policing crisis in this country, for instance.

Sessions—the chief lawyer for the government and the head of the Justice Department, which is entrusted with ensuring that the nation's laws are faithfully carried out and holding government officials accountable to abiding by their oaths of office to "uphold and defend the Constitution"—doesn't think we've got a policing problem in America.

In fact, Sessions thinks the police are doing a great job (apart from "the individual misdeeds of bad actors," that is).

For that matter, so does Trump.

Really, really great.

Indeed, Sessions thinks the nation's police forces are doing *such* a great job that they should be rewarded with more military toys (weapons, gear, equipment) and less oversight by the Justice Department.

As for Trump, he believes "the dangerous anti-police atmosphere in America is wrong" and has vowed to "end it."

Excuse me for a moment while I flush what remains of the Constitution down the toilet.

Clearly, Trump has not been briefed on the fact that it has never been safer to be a cop in America. According to *Newsweek*, “it’s safer to be a cop than it is to simply *live* in many U.S. cities... It’s safer to be a cop than it is to live in Baltimore. It’s safer to be a cop than it is to be a fisher, logger, pilot, roofer, miner, trucker or taxi driver. It’s safer to be a cop today than it’s been in years, decades, or even a century, by some measures.”

You know what’s dangerous?

Being a citizen of the American police state.

Treating cops as deserving of greater protections than their fellow citizens.

And training cops to think and act like they’re soldiers on a battlefield.

As journalist Daniel Bier warns, “If you tell cops over and over that they’re in a war, they’re under siege, they’re under attack, and that citizens are the enemy—instead of the people they’re supposed to protect—you’re going to create an atmosphere of fear, tension, and hostility that can only end badly, as it has for so many people.”

Frankly, if there’s a war taking place in this country, it’s a war on the American people.

After all, we’re the ones being shot at and tasered and tracked and beaten and intimidated and threatened and invaded and probed.

And what is the government doing to fix this policing crisis that threatens the safety of man, woman and child in this country?

Not a damn thing.

Incredibly, according to a study by the American Medical Association, police-inflicted injuries send more than 50,000 Americans to hospital emergency rooms every year.

Yet as *Slate* warns, if you even dare to criticize a police officer let alone challenge the myth of the hero cop—a myth “used to legitimize brutality as necessary, justify policies that favor the police, and punish anyone who dares to question police tactics or oppose the unions’ agendas”—you will be roundly denounced “as disloyal, un-American, and dangerous.”

As reporter David Feige concludes, “We should appreciate the value and sacrifice of those who choose to serve and protect. But that appreciation should not constitute a get-out-of-jail-free card for the vast army of 800,000 people granted general arrest powers and increasingly armed with automatic weapons and armored vehicles.”

Vast army.

Equipped with deadly weapons.

Empowered with arrest powers.

Immune from accountability for wrongdoing.

What is this, Hitler's America?

Have we strayed so far from our revolutionary roots that we no longer even recognize tyranny when it's staring us in the face?

The fact that police are choosing to fatally resolve encounters with their fellow citizens by using their guns speaks volumes about what is wrong with policing in America today, where police officers are being dressed in the trappings of war, drilled in the deadly art of combat, and trained to look upon "every individual they interact with as an armed threat and every situation as a deadly force encounter in the making."

Mind you, the federal government is the one responsible for turning our police into extensions of the military, having previously distributed billions of dollars' worth of military equipment to local police agencies, including high-powered weapons, assault vehicles, drones, tactical gear, body armor, weapon scopes, infrared imaging systems and night-vision goggles—equipment intended for use on the battlefield—not to mention federal grants for militarized training and SWAT teams.

Thus, despite what Attorney General Sessions wants you to believe, the daily shootings, beatings and roadside strip searches (in some cases, rape) of American citizens by police are not isolated incidents.

Likewise, the events of recent years are not random occurrences: the invasive surveillance, the extremism reports, the civil unrest, the protests, the shootings, the bombings, the military exercises and active shooter drills, the color-coded alerts and threat assessments, the fusion centers, the transformation of local police into extensions of the military, the distribution of military equipment and weapons to local police forces, the government databases containing the names of dissidents and potential troublemakers.

Rather, these developments are all part of a concerted effort to destabilize the country, institute *de facto* martial law disguised as law and order, and shift us fully into the iron jaws of the police state.

So, no, the dramatic increase in police shootings are not accidents.

It wasn't an "accident" that 26-year-old Andrew Lee Scott, who had committed no crime, was gunned down by police who knocked aggressively on the wrong door at 1:30 am, failed to identify themselves as police, and then repeatedly shot and killed Scott when he answered the door while holding a gun in self-defense. Police were investigating a speeding incident by engaging in a middle-of-the-night "knock and talk" in Scott's apartment complex.

It wasn't an "accident" when Levar Edward Jones was shot by a South Carolina police officer during a routine traffic stop over a seatbelt violation as he was in the process of reaching for his license and registration. The trooper justified his shooting of the unarmed man by insisting that Jones reached for his license "aggressively."

It wasn't an "accident" when Francisco Serna, a 73-year-old grandfather with early-stage dementia, was shot and killed by police for refusing to remove his hand from his pocket. Police were investigating an uncorroborated report that Serna had a gun, but it turned out he was holding a crucifix and made no aggressive movements before he was gunned down.

It wasn't an "accident" when Nandi Cain, Jr., was thrown to the ground, choked and punched over a dozen times by a police officer after the officer stopped Cain for jaywalking. Cain made no aggressive moves toward the officer, and had even removed his jacket to show the officer he had no weapon.

It wasn't an "accident" when 65-year-old Thomas Smith, suffering from Parkinson's Disease, called 911 because of a medical problem only to have his home raided by a SWAT team. Smith was thrown to the ground and placed in handcuffs because his condition prevented him from following police instructions.

It wasn't an "accident" when John Wrana, a 95-year-old World War II veteran, died after being shot multiple times by a police officer with a Mossberg shotgun during a raid at Wrana's room at an assisted living center. This, despite the fact that there were five police officers on the scene to subdue Wrana, who used a walker to get around and was "armed" with a shoehorn and not a knife, as police assumed.

It wasn't an "accident" when a 10-year-old boy was subdued by two police officers using a taser because the child became unruly at the day care center he attended.

It wasn't an "accident" when police in South Dakota routinely subjected persons, some as young as 3 years old, to catheterizations in order to forcibly obtain urine samples.

It wasn't an "accident" when Charles Kinsey, a behavioral therapist, was shot by police as he was trying to help an autistic patient who had wandered away from his group home and was sitting in the middle of the road playing with a toy car. The officer who shot Kinsey was reportedly told that neither Kinsey nor the patient had a weapon.

It wasn't an "accident" when Frank Arnal Baker was mauled by a police dog and kicked by an officer for not complying quickly enough with a police order. Baker, who had done nothing wrong, spent two weeks in the hospital with fractured ribs and collapsed lungs and needed skin grafts for the dog-bite injuries.

No, none of these incidents were accidents.

Nor are they isolated, anecdotal examples of a few bad actors, as Sessions insists.

Far from being isolated or anecdotal, police misconduct cases have become so prevalent as to jeopardize the integrity of all of the nation's law enforcement agencies.

Unfortunately, as I make clear in my book *Battlefield America: The War on the American People*, this is what happens when you allow so-called "law and order" to matter more than justice: corruption flourishes, injustice reigns and tyranny takes hold.

Yet no matter what Trump and Sessions seem to believe, nowhere in the Constitution does it say that Americans must obey the government.

Despite the corruption of Congress and the complicity of the courts, nowhere does the Constitution require absolute subservience to the government's dictates.

And despite what most police officers seem to believe, nowhere does the Constitution state that Americans must comply with a police order.

To suggest otherwise is authoritarianism.

This is also, as abolitionist Frederick Douglass noted, the definition of slavery: "I didn't know I was a slave until I found out I couldn't do the things I wanted."

You want to know what it means to be a slave in the American police state?

It means being obedient, compliant and Sieg Heil-ing every government agent armed with a weapon. If you believe otherwise, try standing up for your rights, being vocal about your freedoms, or just challenging a government dictate, and see how long you last before you're staring down the barrel of a loaded government-issued gun.