

# Facing the Possibility of Imminent Martial Law in The U.S.

by Al Vick

One morning, only weeks ago, I awoke early, and as I am accustomed to doing, put on NPR in order to listen to the latest news as I made my coffee. The topic of conversation concerned al Qaida's presence in Iraq. The news anchor was engaged with someone who was apparently, an expert on current affairs in that country. When the anchor asked the interviewee just how active al Qaida was in Iraq at that particular time, I listened very carefully.

The report given was consistent with everything I had heard up to that point in time; al Qaida's presence in Iraq was minimal at best, and the vast majority of those fighting the U.S. occupation and each other, were mainly native Iraqi insurgents, both Shiite and Sunni.

It was only perhaps, a week or two after hearing that report when I noticed an abrupt change in the way the news from Iraq was being reported. Suddenly, U.S. forces were described as fighting not insurgents, as had been the story line for months, but rather, al Qaida. Suddenly, that terrorist group was reportedly, fighting U.S. and Iraqi forces just about everywhere around Baghdad and the rest of that tortured country. How could an almost nonexistent entity in that country have amassed such a visible and formidable fighting force in such a short amount of time?

The most likely answer is that it didn't. This new version of the news from Iraq was propaganda, pure and simple. The change in language came somewhere between the scandal surrounding Attorney General Alberto Gonzales' having allegedly, brought about the firings of various district attorneys for political purposes, and the Democrat-controlled Congress' bluster about adding amendments to a military spending bill that would have initiated a timetable for withdrawal. In other words, President Bush and Vice President Cheney were meeting with some resistance to their policies and likely, found it necessary to once again, play the fear card. They fully understand that a frightened populace is a controlled populace.

For those who follow current events, the Bush Regime's antics have become very predictable. I clearly remember making a prediction of my own during the weeks leading up to the 2004 presidential election. At the time, I mentioned to friends and acquaintances that it was quite likely that Osama bin Laden would re-appear just in time to affect the presidential election. Late one afternoon, just four or five days before the election, I was sitting in my favorite pub enjoying a brew when I glanced up at the television screen and saw – you guessed it, Osama himself, as he delivered another message designed to put fear into the heart of every American. After all, how could Americans not re-elect their war president when this master terrorist dared to, once again, take to the airwaves with his proclamations of doom for us all. "Right on schedule," I told myself, while marveling at the regime's consistency in playing the fear card whenever it suits them.

I am not trying to say that there is no terror threat against us. It has been my observation however, that the threat level always seems to be greatly exaggerated when the Bush/Cheney Regime finds itself em-

broiled in controversy over either its illegal and unconstitutional acts, or the pointlessness of its continued occupation of Iraq.

In recent weeks however, the rhetoric about terrorists at our doorstep has almost reached a fever pitch. A recently released <I>National Intelligence Estimate</I> states that al Qaida has regrouped and is now as powerful, or more powerful than ever. Further, the report reiterates that the terror organization's numbers are growing, as various groups now prefer to work under the al Qaida umbrella, even while working independently. Some politicians and other government officials are now warning that a new and destructive terror attack is imminent. Recently, Vice President Cheney warned that a nuclear attack is our biggest threat.

Homeland Security Director, Michael Chertoff stated this July that he believes the U.S. will suffer another terror attack sometime this summer. When asked what evidence he could offer to support his claim, Mr. Chertoff responded that he had a "gut feeling." Of course, no frightening of the populace would be complete without the appearance of a new Osama bin Laden video. There was no disappointment here, as the terrorist returned to the airwaves in order to declare that the Islamic martyr is indeed, a happy person.

It is difficult to ascertain where the truth ends and where the lie begins in this brave new Orwellian world that has been ushered in upon us. The Bush/Cheney regime has so obviously lied and exaggerated so many times that virtually nothing they say can be believed. Still, even as they continue to terrorize the hearts and minds of their own citizens with the constant barrage of fear mongering, there is good reason for deep concern.

Since the events of 9/11, the regime in the White House, with the assistance of a complicit Congress, has worked diligently to undermine the basic civil liberties of all U.S. citizens, and to abolish the basic human rights and dignity of virtually, anyone who resists their aggressive foreign policies. These have, for the most part, accomplished their goal through the issuing of executive orders, signing statements, or the passage of unconstitutional legislation such as the *USA PATRIOT Act* and last year's *Military Commissions Act*. The process has been accomplished incrementally, often with barely a mention inside the mainstream press. The American people have become like frogs sitting in a pan of water. The heat is being turned up slowly but steadily, so that we do not notice; the water is now approaching the boiling point.

On May 9, in an absolutely chilling move, President Bush issued *National Security Presidential Direct 51*, a directive which, for all practical purposes, allows him to suspend the Constitution and claim dictatorial powers in the event of some vaguely-defined catastrophe such as a terror attack, mass civil uprising, or some natural disaster such as another Katrina. Neither Congress nor the mainstream media have questioned the constitutionality of this presidential directive.

On July 17, George Bush, now likely drunk with his lust for power, issued another order entitled, *Blocking Property of Certain*

*Persons Who Threaten Stabilization Efforts in Iraq*. Under the provisions of this order, Bush has given himself the power to seize the property of anyone of his choosing that opposes his immoral occupation of Iraq. One can lose his or her property for simply writing a letter to the editor that is critical of the president's war policies.

For all practical purposes, the regime has accomplished its goal of setting up the structure for martial law and a full-blown police state; and, thanks to a complicit press and a Congress that seems not to care, very few have even noticed. Even as daily life here appears to continue as usual, the clock is ticking and life as we know it can be brought to an abrupt end; this, just on the whim of those residing within the White House – at the whim of those who claim to be above the law, even as they continue to be embroiled in controversy. Bush, Cheney, and other members of their criminal regime, are well aware of the fact that they can be held responsible and put on trial for myriads of crimes, including those against humanity and against the Constitution. It is likely that they are simply biding their time, waiting for the next terror attack that will propel them to their final triumph, **the implementation of full martial law and military rule in the United States.**

Considering the lack of information in the mainstream media and the general public apathy, which seems almost epidemic throughout the country, I wonder how many people have considered just what life under martial law will be like if, or when it happens.

First of all, those who have dissented, or have otherwise opposed the unconstitutional regime that now rules over us, will likely be in great danger. I personally take no comfort in this realization. One of the first acts committed by both Hitler and Stalin was to go after the dissidents and intellectuals. These were the people who were able to see through the transparent claims made by both dictators and their supporters.

Recent history is full of examples during which those who believed that "it can never happen here," suddenly awoke during the night to the sound of their doors being kicked in. These were quickly separated from their lovers, families, and their friends; then, were whisked away under the cover of darkness – taken to some gulag from which there was no return. The well-known book entitled, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, well documents the horrors under which a teenaged Jewish girl, filled with hopes and dreams, was forced to live out the last months of her life under Nazi occupation in the Netherlands.

Martial law will likely mean that none of us will have any rights at all. The police and the military will be able to enter homes without warrants, and likely will barge into our places of business or employment at will. Freedom of movement may well be severely restricted while curfews, more likely than not, will be in place. As recently occurred in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, it may not only be police who, with increased powers, will be observing the people from every street corner; rather, military or paid mercenary contractors from companies such as *Blackwater Consulting* may be monitoring our every movement.

The Bush Regime and a complicit Congress have already taken away our right to Habeas Corpus; that is, our right to hear the charges and evidence against us. The principles enshrined in this right, which is also protected in our Bill of Rights, date back to the Magna Carta. Habeas Corpus may still allowed in ordinary criminal cases, but for those who now oppose the administration, it can be taken away at will. Still, it could get much worse, and as history shows us, people will be likely be arrested without cause; there

will be no right to an attorney or a trial before a jury of one's peers.

All of the rights and freedoms that we have taken for granted will likely be swept away in any new terror attack that the Bush Administration has been telling us, is imminent. Even as I type these words, I do so with the knowledge that our spineless Congress, and in particular, many Democrats who the American people voted into office last November in order to put a stop to the antics of the White House, just voted to give Bush and Cheney the ability to monitor our electronic communications without warrants.

Without wanting to sound too pessimistic, I am fast coming to the conclusion that there is not much those of us who understand what is happening can do about our ever-accelerating fall into fascism. Certainly, our so-called "representatives" in Congress do not have sufficient courage in order to stand up to this president, no matter how many e-mails and phone calls they receive from their constituents. Instead, they will continue worrying about their own political skins and will cringe in fear whenever the fascists attempt to define them as "soft on terrorism." The courts are being stacked continuously with right-wing hacks, many of which essentially believe in authoritarian government. As this process continues, those who get caught up in the political crosshairs of Bush and Cheney will find themselves without legal recourse; this, even as we are not currently under martial law. Sadly, the so-called "Fourth Estate," the mainstream press, seems content to act as a stenographer for the regime, rather than act as the guardian of democracy.

Without wanting to downplay the usefulness of the various political tools we have in the box, I wonder if it might be time to consider other alternatives - methods by which we can survive a potential reign of terror that may be lurking in our near future. Several years ago, I read a book by Starhawk entitled, *The Fifth Sacred Thing*. The novel describes a world in which our greatest fears had become manifest. Environmental desecration was everywhere, as was brutal oppression and fascism. Yet, in the midst of all the prevalent ugliness and horror, there was a thriving community existing in San Francisco. As the army with its agents of oppression approached, the community discussed the mechanisms by which it would cope.

If there are any important lessons to be learned from Starhawk's book, they would have to at least include the importance of forming sustainable and support-based communities. Surviving what may soon be thrust upon us will require working together. Communities need not only exist in the countryside, but can thrive even in our most crowded cities. The *South-Central Farm*, which existed in Los Angeles until recently, is a testimony of just what people working and supporting one another can accomplish. Even when the farm came under the developer's knife, the community continued to exist and has moved on to overcome the obstacles set in its path. Here in the Fayetteville area, a group has been meeting on the last Saturday of the month for several months now. Its purpose is not to confront the powers that be politically; rather, its goal is to build a community of people similar to that demonstrated in Starhawk's book.

As our society and country continue to plunge toward dictatorship and fascism, it is important to remember that we are not powerless, even if we seem impotent in our efforts to affect those in control. We can and should honor the spirit that motivates us, even as we continue in our efforts to end injustice and to build strong communities.