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Tyranny Comes Home: The Domestic Fate of U.S. Militarism

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Part 1- Losing the Great Republic

Chapter 1, Mark Twain's Ominous Warning

1. What was the essence of Mark Twain's warning about the "Great Republic"? To what extent do you find this opening reference a useful one?
2. On page 4, Coyne and Hall tell us, "The militarism that characterizes U.S. foreign policy is a central tenet of the country's national identity." Do you agree? And non-US members, to what extent does this apply to YOUR nation?

Chapter 2, The Boomerang Effect: How Social Control Comes Home

3. Beginning on page 24, Coyne and Hall relate four factors that tend toward the expansion of government under conditions of fear. Which of the four are the most malleable? In other words, which are more or less likely to be harnessed by the public *against* such expansion?
4. In Chapter 2, Hall and Coyne outline what they call the Boomerang Effect, central to which is state-produced social control of the foreign target population. To what extent do you think the resulting social control of the DOMESTIC population is really just an unintended consequence?
5. Hall and Coyne draw an important distinction between the "scale" and "scope" of government. Why are they so insistent on recognizing this distinction? And why have economists ignored the question of scope for so long?

6. How does *fear* motivate government intervention? How does citizens' fear lead to an expansion of government scope? Is this an inevitable process? Are there instances in history (US or otherwise) when this has NOT been the case?
7. Coyne and Hall are keen to remind us that the Boomerang Effect is NOT a "bad man theory." Why is this so important to them? Why does this also suggest a role for economics in mitigation the Boomerang Effect? Do they oversell its potential? What *else* ought we to consider?
8. Coyne and Hall are concerned that foreign intervention often has the ultimate effect of undermining our democracy at home. They *also* allow that some of these changes are ultimately approved of- or even demanded by- the citizenry. So which is it? Are we getting what we "want" or is the democratic nature of the polity in peril?

Chapter 3, A Perfect Storm: Why America is Susceptible

9. The chapter begins with a warning about the "dual nature" of government in the United States. What's the difference between "dignified" and "efficient" institutions in their framework, and how did this distinction come about?
10. On page 60, Coyne and Hall warn about the dangers of the "romantic view of publicly spirited civil servants openly debating national security policy." How *should* national security policy be debated? How *should* we determine the "national interest?"
11. Coyne and Hall identify a fundamental ideological change that occurred during the Truman administration. How did this enable US national security institutions to grow, despite the constraints envisioned by the Founders. Is this something the Founders simply could not have foreseen? Why do C&H suggest this is so counter-intuitive to "those who take the paradox of government seriously"? (p 57)
12. Coyne and Hall remind us at the close of the chapter that its consequences will often be neglected in discussions of policy. This calls the earlier methodology question back to mind. Whose obligation is it to shed light on these trends, and what "evidence" ought to be brought to bear on these decisions?
13. How are elected officials limited in their ability to monitor and constrain the "efficient institutions"? What remedies can you suggest to make it easier or more likely that elected officials will/can monitor them?

14. At the conclusion of chapter 3, the authors tell us, "This is not intended to be a polemic." (p 66) But IS it? If not, what is it? Is this purely a scholarly contribution, or is there any political intentions or possibilities?

Chapter 4, Surveillance

15. Chapter 4 is a lesson in how the US surveillance state is nothing new; Coyne and Hall trace its roots back at least to the American Founding. What most surprised you about their historical account, and why?
16. "The reality is that nation-states, and especially relatively strong countries, such as the United States, not only establish international rules but also influence their enforcement." (p 63) What makes this possible, and to what extent is America alone in its ability to exert such influence?
17. Coyne and Hall suggest the surveillance state experienced a tipping point with the US occupation of the Philippines. What was so significant about this in terms of the expansion of the surveillance state?
18. In telling the story of Captain Ralph Van Derman, the "father of US military intelligence" (p 78), Coyne and Hall describe how he built a "self-extending and self-reinforcing" system. What do they mean by this, and how has this characterized the continual development of the system?
19. Chapter 4 also includes the story of the rise of the NSA. Coyne and Hall describe the four concurrent operations undertaken at the same time- SHAMROCK, MINARET, COINTELPRO and CHAOS. Which of these do *you* believe to have been the most dangerous, and why?
20. What was the role of the Church Committee (starting p 88) in exposing the expansion of the surveillance state? What factors led to its inception? What sort of circumstances do you think need to prevail *today* for similar revelations to become public?
21. What have been the key technological innovations that have enabled the growth and development of the US surveillance state? What sort of predictions might you make for its FUTURE? What will be some of the key technologies we see next?
22. What do Coyne and Hall mean when they say circumstances "push the paradox of government up a level?" (p 92) What can we do beyond trying to keep the surveillance state at most at the status quo?

Chapter 5, The Militarization of Police

23. What most distinguishes the War on Drugs and the War on Terror from previous US wars? How do these differences explain their disproportionate effects on the militarization of police?
24. How has the distinction between local police and the US military shrunk over time? And back to the Philippines... How did the US occupation there contribute so disproportionately to the militarization of US police?
25. Consider the ascent of August Vollmer and his attempts at "modernizing" the LAPD. To what extent must "modernizing" be synonymous with "militarizing?"
26. What role is there for national-level data collection? Think about fingerprinting, for example. That there *are* finger print records for many available to law enforcement may not be bothersome. August Vollmer's lobbying for MANDATORY fingerprints for all citizens... Well that's another story. So again, where do we draw the line???
27. Coyne and Hall note the role of the government in "marketing" fear of drugs to citizens beginning the 1970s. To what extent do you think a "War on Drugs" as has emerged was the INTENTION of such programs? Was this the "something" the state hoped citizens would clamor for?
28. There is another mention (p 111) of the "manufacture" of fear among citizens, this time on the part of the "terrorism industry." Who/what IS that "industry"? And is what we have seen in its wake merely a study in unintended consequences, or something more sinister?
29. "The very nature of surveillance means that those in power can act outside of public scrutiny." (p 93) How can we know *when* surveillance is in the public interest, and *how much* surveillance is in the public interest???
30. Coyne and Hall describe the remarkable violence that has attended the War on Drugs. What do they mean when they say, "This violence resulted not from any physical effects of drug use, but from the incentives created by prohibition policies"?

Chapter 6, Drones

31. What makes drones different from the military spillovers thus far discussed? How are their justifications for use domestically different? Are *you* more or less concerned about drones than police militarization, surveillance etc.?

32. How does the domestic use of drones undermine due process, according to the authors? To what extent is this claim over- or under-blown?
33. How did drone technology change from a surveillance to a combat technology? How do we see this playing out domestically? "...current laws do not require government agencies to disclose when and how drones are used." (p 123) Is this an example of the problem of concentrated benefits and dispersed costs? What if the costs are NOT so dispersed- how can the incentive structure be changed?
34. "If current operations involve the gross mistreatment and abuse of US citizens, what does the introduction of deliberately stealthy technology mean for individual rights?" (p 134) How would YOU answer this question?
35. The chapter closes with the claim that, "continued use of drones abroad and domestically is inevitable." (p 136) Is this true? If not, what might happen to stop it?

Chapter 7, Torture

36. Much of the importation of torture tactics domestically is again traced back to the Philippines, and the following creation of the Lodge Committee. How were torture tactics used during the occupation? How much do we REALLY know about it? And how did such tactics morph into "the third degree"?
37. A striking difference in this chapter is the discussion of the importation of tactics, but also *human* capital. Why was this different course taken in the post WW2 years? How was it justified? To what extent do you think this could happen again? Explain.
38. Describe the emergence of psychological torture. Under what circumstances do *you* think such methods are justified? Explain.
39. "...unlike surveillance and police militarization, the use of torture within the United States does not appear to have affected the general American public *en masse*." (p 168) Does this mean we should worry about it more or less? How would YOU prioritize these issues?

Conclusion

40. To what extent do you agree with C&H that America has fully adopted a "militaristic" mindset? How can a change in ideology change the "spirit animating America's foreign policy?" (p 176)

