

COVID-19, Civil Unrest, Fake News, and Political Stability

by Phillip W. Weiss

As if one crisis was not enough, now there are TWO. The first crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, has wrecked the economy; the second crisis, triggered by the death of a black man while under police custody, has put the entire nation on edge. Information about these crises is being provided by Fake News. Hence, no one can be certain as to the truth relating to either crisis. Fake News puts a spin on everything it reports; it does that to get us to think in a certain way. To grab our attention, it packages the news in such a way as to tantalize, thrill, astound, shock, and alarm us. In that way, Fake News injects itself into our psyches and shapes the way we think.

While the Fake News media is busy reporting on the demonstrations, social distancing is now placed on the back burner, at least for the time being. It is remarkable how nimbly Fake News can pivot away from one story to another. It is as if the COVID-19 crisis is now in suspension while civil unrest takes center stage. Sooner or later, however, Fake News will shift its full attention back to the COVID-19 virus, which, according to Fake News, is still out there. It is a story that is far from over and should provide a lot of grist for Fake News for a long time to come.

The first duty of any elected official is to ensure the safety of the public. Between the need to enforce social distancing regulations and the need to

suppress violent demonstrations, even the mayor of New York City, who, upon taking office, made it a point to directly antagonize and denigrate the police, is now towing the law and order line. Any politician who fails to tow the law and order line, or is deemed insufficiently committed to towing that line, will incur the wrath of the public and, more significantly, the ire of Fake News, which will excoriate any politician who demonstrates weakness and lack of resolve.

As the COVID-19 crisis has shown, the power of the state is immense almost beyond measure. Anyone who chooses to directly challenge that power, especially without political cover, does so at their own personal and political risk. It is a prudent person who provides no pretext for government to reveal its power. Between local, state, and county police, and the state National Guards, and the myriad of private security services, there are at least two million persons involved with law enforcement in the United States. And if that is not enough, they are backed up by the United States military, which is the most powerful military force in history, and one that the United States government is willing to use domestically if necessary.

If forced by circumstances to do so, even the most liberal and permissive politician will opt for law and order. Of course, when that happens, it reveals their hypocrisy, but being politicians, they deal with it. It is a rare politician who will resign from office rather than compromise their principles.

What is bothering the people the most is not the spectacle of alleged police brutality, but the wrecked economy. If all the people who feel bothered about the economy took to the streets, then the power of the state would be put to a serious

test. These elements – forty-one million unemployed, the threat to health posed by the COVID-19 virus, an economy that is seriously damaged and not quickly rebounding, masses of people living on the street, two-million people incarcerated in prisons, and the racial divide – all mixed together create a potential powder keg that could irrevocably destabilize the country. It is amazing that the country is still politically intact.

The unity of the United States cannot be taken for granted. Nations can and do fragment. In 1861, the United States split into two countries, the United States and the Confederate States of America. In 1939, Czechoslovakia and Poland ceased to exist. In 1945, Germany was split into four zones from which emerged two separate nations which then became one nation in 1989. In 1947, newly independent India split into two states, India and Pakistan. In 1971, Pakistan split into two states, Pakistan and Bangladesh. In 1991, what remained of the Soviet Union fragmented into twelve separate countries. In 1992, Yugoslavia split into five separate nations. In 2014, the United Kingdom barely avoided splitting into two nations, England and Scotland. The Korean peninsula and the island of Cyprus remain divided. There is an active Basque separatist movement in Spain. The political unity of any nation is temporary. It is only a matter of time before a nation morphs into something new.

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