

Reckoning With the Riots

The people's enemies must be dealt with by measures of whatever severity is required to end this intolerable state of lawlessness.

by Conrad Black



The showdown is coming over urban violence in America. The continuing rioting and destruction erupting in new cities every few days is almost certain to provide yet another profound demarcation of opinion over how to govern the United States and address the problems that have so stirred the country since the killing of African American George Floyd by a white Minneapolis policeman on May 25. America's toleration of a completely unjustifiable level of general violence compared to anything in its past demonstrates considerable progress in civility and restraint in the past 50 years.

In 1968, the legendary mayor of Chicago, Richard J. Daley, attracted great controversy but not majority disapproval when he publicly told his police not to hesitate to fire live ammunition at violent demonstrators and rioters. As the

immense disturbances surrounding the Democratic National Convention in that city evolved, the mayor indicated that he was not exactly urging his officers to shoot to kill but to shoot to stop the rioting, and implicitly, not to be overly concerned if some lawbreakers died as a result.

There was widespread support for this position. Eleven people were killed, about 500 injured, and more than 2,150 arrested in Chicago; four months earlier, in the riots in at least nine major cities after the assassination of Martin Luther King, 43 were killed, more than 3,000 injured, and over 20,000 arrested.

The disturbances at the 1968 convention were prompted more by anti-Vietnam War militancy than by racial factors, and the principal accused ringleaders were biracial and multicultural. The Democratic convention rightly took some pride in the advances it had secured in the term of outgoing President Lyndon Johnson, who did not attend the convention, in assuring civil and voting rights for African-Americans, and for the extensive Great Society welfare and workfare programs adopted to assist all underprivileged Americans.

In the ensuing Nixon Administration the policy of Vietnamization (handing the ground war over to heavily trained and well-equipped South Vietnamese and other Asian allies, especially the South Koreans, with—when appropriate—massive air support from the United States) sharply reduced American casualties and effectively almost eliminated draft calls for combat roles. It also appeared to be militarily successful, especially in the South Vietnamese defeat of the great North Vietnamese and Vietcong ground offensive of April 1972. In the absence of casualties and in contemplation of a possibly successful extrication from such a difficult war, Americans would not generally engage in or condone violent demonstrations, and they tapered off.

The Fires This Time

In the 50 years since American withdrawal from Vietnam, mob violence has been sporadic. There was severe racial violence over the acquittal of the police who were caught on video beating African American Rodney King in Los Angeles in 1992, resulting in 63 dead, nearly 2,400 injured and over 12,000 arrests and over \$1 billion of property damage. The Ferguson, Missouri riots in 2014 and 2015, over the shooting of young African American Michael Brown by police action, caused 16 injuries and 321 arrests. And in Baltimore in 2015, the death of African-American Freddy Gray at the hands of police caused rioting in which 116 people were injured and 486 arrested.

These incidents did not spread significantly to other communities. If that pattern had been followed this year after the release of the nauseating video of a policeman effectively strangling George Floyd by applying his knee to his neck while other officers suggested he desist, the rioting that followed would have been confined to Minneapolis.

But police abandoned a precinct station, effectively inciting widespread destructive rioting, much of it well organized by heavily armed vandals, arsonists, and pillagers, and the destructive violence was replicated in dozens of cities. Spokespeople volunteered that the Floyd killing was a convenient pretext for an assault upon the whole concept of the United States as a just or even creditable country.

Resentment of widespread police mistreatment of African-Americans is deep-seated and substantially justified. There have been great efforts to improve police training, to elevate African-American officers including many of the chiefs of police of the country's largest cities, and there can be little doubt that the abrasive relationship between the black community and police had significantly improved.

But with many millions of encounters every year between police

and blacks, it is a perpetual tinderbox, and there is no doubt that this is a genuine grievance and a serious failing in American law enforcement that has required an unconscionable length of time to address with adequate determination and thoroughness.

Whitewashing Leftist Violence

Now we have an additional element. The country had a glimpse of the militant wing of Black Lives Matter (BLM) with the murder of eight white policemen in Dallas and Baton Rouge in 2016. It had a further glimpse of the antics of BLM and the trained and masked street hooligan Antifa (“anti-fascist,” but a fair replication in fact), with the opposition of the ragtag of neo-Nazis and Klansmen that still fester in parts of the old South at Charlottesville in 2017 over a statue of General Robert E. Lee.

Antifa originally reared its head in ferocious violence in 2017 against an authorized Trump rally in Portland, Oregon, and in an anarchic destructive outburst, also in 2017 at the Berkeley campus of the University of California. Liberal America was extremely slow to grasp the proportions of this threat. Even then-House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) warned that Antifa leaders should be prosecuted.

But the most vapid and reflexive liberal Left greeted Antifa as energetic new opponents of the Trump regime; Christopher Cuomo on CNN said Antifa were “idealists.” There were similar apologia across the Trump-hating media, where any opponent of the president, no matter how extreme or despicable, is embraced.

Such is the vitriolic hatred of President Trump in what normally would be respectable liberal democratic circles, in official positions, and in the media that they are having almost terminal difficulty denouncing appropriately the murderous violence of many of the current “peaceful

protesters.”

The rioters trying to burn down the federal courthouse in Portland for 60 consecutive nights routinely have been represented as a benign group of angry “moms” locking arms to object to racial violence. Much of the American media has lastingly disgraced itself by the scandalous misrepresentation of anti-white racist urban guerrillas as benign seekers of traditional reform.

We cannot now be far from the point where the country will have to choose between intelligent law enforcement with a redoubled urgency to the avoidance of racial oppression in even a single case, and continuation of this insufferable pusillanimous drivel that the problem is the presence of federal agents to execute the president’s constitutional duty of protecting federal property and enforcing the laws of the nation.

Trump, it is said, must “bring us together.” Violent and irreconcilable enemies of the constitutionally established government do not wish to be brought together. Those disposed to constructive compromise must be separated from the criminally violent enemies of the state, and therefore of the American people, who created the state. The people’s enemies must be dealt with by measures of whatever severity is required to end this intolerable state of lawlessness.

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