Does America Need a King?

BY ROBERT MORLEY

When a person takes the office of the presidency, does that endow him with special God-like abilities that help him distinguish between good and evil, or right from wrong? Do presidents automatically become infallible upon taking the oath of office?

Obviously not.

Then why is the Department of Justice (doj) trying to give the current president autocratic, kingly powers—powers that require divine, God-given wisdom to execute in a righteous and just manner?

On February 4, NBC revealed a leaked Justice Department white paper justifying what President Obama has already been doing—suspending constitutional protections and executing Americans without formal charges or trial.

Harvard law professor Noah Feldman calls the policy a repudiation of the Magna Carta, that fundamental law that took power away from the monarch and gave it to the people and their representatives.

doj lawyers (appointed by President Obama)—whose job it is to ensure that the administration obeys the law—assert in their paper that it is lawful to kill American citizens without due process as long as three conditions are met. One: “an informed, high-level official” has determined that the citizen poses an imminent threat of violence against the United States. Two: Capture is infeasible. Three: The killing is conducted in a manner consistent with applicable principles of the laws of war.

According to the white paper, as long as a high-level official thinks you’re a threat, it’s hard to capture you, and he does it relatively “cleanly,” he can kill you. Doesn’t matter if you are in an active war zone or not. Doesn’t matter if you are a member of al Qaeda or not.

It might seem like good policy to strike bad guys before they can act.

But politics aside, disregarding the Constitution has set a dangerous precedent.

Former New Jersey Superior Court Judge Andrew Napolitano says the white paper should shock every American. The Justice Department’s “logic is flawed, its premises are bereft of any appreciation for the values of the Declaration of Independence and the supremacy of the Constitution, and its rationale could be used to justify any breaking of any law by any ‘informed, high-level official of the U.S. government,’” he warns (emphasis added throughout).

Napolitano says the “lawful” power to suspend universal constitutional protections guaranteed to all persons—and kill them without any due process whatsoever—should be repugnant to Americans. “This is the power claimed by kings and tyrants,” he writes. “It is the power we have arguably fought countless wars to prevent … Now … it is here.”

The president and various unnamed “high-level officials” have taken it upon themselves to act as accuser, prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner, with no legislative or judicial oversight.

For more than a year, the Obama Justice Department fought to hide the secret legal research it used to justify the president’s killing of U.S. citizens overseas using drones. It claimed the complicated research was so sensitive it could not be revealed to the public.

Judge Colleen McMahon didn’t like that explanation at all. But there was nothing she could do to force the administration to explain how its actions weren’t violating the Constitution that gave it its power in the first place.

“I can find no way around the thicket of laws and precedents that effectively allow the executive branch of our government to proclaim as perfectly lawful certain actions that seem on their face incompatible with our Constitution and laws, while keeping the reasons for their conclusions secret,” she wrote.
Egypt-Iran Rapprochement Could Be a Message

**EGYPTIAN INDEPENDENT | February 18**

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad’s historic visit to Cairo for a summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), as well as President Mohamed Morsi’s red carpet reception, has led to mounting speculation across the region that a possible rapprochement is in the making after a decades-long deadlock.

Morsi’s warm reception reflected a shift in attitude from his visit to Iran during the summit of the 120-member Non-Aligned Movement in Tehran in August, observers say. …

But the political situation in Egypt is also shifting, with dwindling support for the first elected president, not only from traditional secular opposition groups but also from his major political allies, the ultraconservative Salafi movement. …

With both leaders facing mounting pressure at home and abroad, detractors of Morsi and his Iranian counterpart have been questioning the motivations behind the historic visit. Many agree the visit sends a strong message, at least to international powers. …

As Tehran continues to flex its regional muscles, much to Washington’s annoyance, Cairo appears to have begun imparting messages of its own, marking out a foreign policy route that could equally distress Gulf counterparts. …

As Iran and Egypt seek to carve out a new role in the changing political landscape of the region, the U.S. and certain Gulf monarchies are keen that the two powers maintain a certain distance. …

The two countries, however, remain at odds over several issues, including Syria, which was suspended from the OIC at its last summit despite Iranian objections. …

Assad’s Troops Retreat From Golan

**DEBKAFILE | February 19**

President Bashar al-Assad has evacuated most of the troops of his 5th Army Division from their permanent bases on the Golan opposite Israeli forces and transferred the unit along with its artillery to Damascus, debkafile’s military sources report.

The Syrian ruler’s step had three purposes:

1. To reinforce his Damascus defenses.
2. To carve out a buffer zone along the Israeli border and leave it under rebel control.
3. To provide the jihadists fighting in rebel ranks with access to the Israeli border fence.

Senior officers in the IDF’s northern command believe it is just a matter of time before these al Qaeda-associated fighters hurl themselves at the border fence to break through, or target Israeli military targets from across the Syrian border.

Assad first practiced this stratagem on Syria’s northern frontier with Turkey. Six months ago, he opened the door of his border region to let armed bands of the separatist PKK (Kurdish Workers’ Party) through from Iraq and set up new strike bases opposite Turkey’s back door, to which they could flee after attacks.

The PKK took full advantage of this opportunity. Indeed, to curb the Kurdish offensive, Ankara was forced to enter into negotiations with PKK leaders for a settlement of their claims, although they are still poised in Syria to resume their attacks.

Israel does not have that option because most of the Islamists fighting with the Syrian rebels are associated with al Qaeda and committed to jihad against the Jewish state. …

Tunisians Furious

**MIDDLE EAST ONLINE | February 20**

Tunisia was in political limbo on Wednesday as President Moncef Marzouki suffered setbacks in his bid to replace Prime Minister Hamadi Jebali, who quit after failing in his plan to form a non-partisan cabinet.

Talks between Marzouki and Rached Ghannouchi, head of Islamist Ennahda party, ended inconclusively, dashing hopes of a soon end to Tunisia’s deepest political crisis since the revolt that ousted Zine El Abidine Ben Ali two years ago. …

As well as the row over the new government, there is deadlock over the drafting of a constitution, with parliament divided over the nature of Tunisia’s future political system 15 months after it was elected. …

Tunisia was plunged into the crisis when leftist politician Chokri Belaid was shot dead outside his home in Tunis on February 6. … The assassination did little to ease the misgivings of liberals and secularists who believe Ennahda is failing to rein in religious extremists threatening the stability of Tunisia. …

The political deadlock has left the country paralyzed. Since the revolution, Tunisia has also been rocked by violence blamed on radical Salafists, and ongoing social unrest over the government’s failure to improve poor living conditions.

**TW IN BRIEF**

- **Why women fear Tahrir Square**

After two years of the “new Egypt,” sexual harassment has increased beyond pre-revolution levels. Today, women walk the streets in fear of attack and exploitation in a way they never did before. The attacks add to mounting evidence that the current administration is a far cry from the
Berlin Warns Italians Against Berlusconi

It was German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble who allegedly fired the first shot. In an interview with the Italian newsmagazine l’Espresso late last week, Schäuble warned Italians against voting for Silvio Berlusconi in general elections scheduled for February 24 and 25.

“Silvio Berlusconi may be an effective campaign strategist,” the magazine quotes Schäuble as saying. “But my advice to the Italians is not to make the same mistake again by re-electing him.”

[T]wo more top German politicians have warned against reelecting a man who many see as being partially responsible for the economic troubles facing the country.

“We are of course not a party in the Italian campaign,” German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle told the center-left Süddeutsche Zeitung in comments printed on Tuesday. “But whoever ends up forming the next government, we are emphatic that (Rome’s) pro-European path and necessary reforms are continued.” …

And Chancellor Merkel? She has so far remained silent on the Italian campaign. But her antipathy for Berlusconi is not something she goes out of her way to hide. In a much cited press conference with then French
HAVING GRABBED the attention of the whole world by his shock resignation from papal office, the subsequent actions of Joseph Ratzinger give an inkling as to his future influence within the Vatican and in global politics.

On Saturday, Ratzinger summoned Italian Prime Minister Mario Monti to an unscheduled private audience. With the Italian elections looming within days, the pope has already gone public on endorsing Monti’s candidature for election as Italy’s prime minister.

With indications that the euro crisis is deepening, it is apparent that strong, assertive leadership is going to be required to dig the EU out of its financial hole.

Mario Monti has already described Joseph Ratzinger’s encyclical Caritas in Veritate as amounting to a blueprint for a “new world order.” If Monti is elected prime minister of Italy, and if the September elections in Germany produce a strong, action-oriented chancellor who is similarly attuned to the worth of Ratzinger’s encyclical as the basis for a new world order, then it becomes entirely feasible that they will work, with the support of Roman Catholic EU elites, to bring that order to fruition.

La Stampa reported that as he presented Benedict XVI’s social encyclical in Saint John Lateran, the pope’s cathedral, on Feb. 23, 2010, Monti declared that “The Caritas in Veritate document resembles a technical governing handbook for society in which economy plays a fundamental role, as a natural outcome of ethical reflection, and even has the agreement of those who do not share in the Catholic ethical vision” (Nov. 14, 2011, emphasis added throughout). Monti used that occasion also to publicly declare himself “to be Catholic.”

Mario Monti is a member of the EU splinter organization called “The Spinelli Group.” That group is committed to establishing a federal Europe based on the Catholic social chapter that underpins the pope’s “governing handbook for society.” Endorsement of that Roman imperialism vision marks Monti out as one of those in tune with the European elites who are in the process at this time of carving up Europe into a continent where the many will become the vassals of the few.

Monti was summoned by Pope Benedict to an unscheduled meeting behind closed doors last weekend. Is it possible that their discussion centered on the pope’s will that, should Monti gain the Italian premiership next Sunday, Benedict would be encouraging Monti to lead a crusade for the implementation of the global order as outlined in Caritas in Veritate?

One thing is for sure, with every nail that is daily driven into the coffin of the present failed global system, the great prophecies of Revelation 13 and 17 come one step closer to fulfillment!

Follow Ron Fraser: Twitter

President Nicolas Sarkozy in the fall of 2011, she merely chuckled when asked about Berlusconi’s willingness to push through reforms.

His recent campaign will not have changed her mind. “Il Cavaliere,” as Berlusconi is known, has made attacks on Merkel a central feature of his campaign, and he has sought to paint Monti as being a pawn of Berlin. …

Germany to send up to 330 soldiers to Mali

Germany will send up to 330 soldiers to Mali, the German cabinet agreed on February 19. Up to 180 of these will go as part of the EU’s mission to train Mali’s army. Germany is already supporting the French effort in Mali by flying French troops to the country. Germany’s cabinet gave its permission for the German Air Force to conduct air-to-air refueling for French fighter jets, if France requests it. The EU mission will begin in May when 200 EU military advisers will train four battalions of 640 men each. The mission will last 15 months and use up to 500 soldiers. Three hundred and thirty soldiers is a significant contribution for Germany, which traditionally shies away from large-scale military involvement. It comes just weeks after Germany began deploying up to 400 soldiers and two Patriot missile batteries in Turkey. America is no longer leading the confrontation with radical Islam. As it draws back, Europe is stepping forward. This is an important trend. The next issue of the Trumpet magazine will have more on this important subject.

Pope Benedict approves German to head troubled Vatican bank

The Vatican was drawn into a new controversy over its bank on February 15. It has appointed a new president over the secretive institution, a man who is also chairman of a company that makes German warships. Ernst von Freyberg was appointed by a commission of cardinals. He was given “full consent” by Pope Benedict XVI. At a briefing at the Vatican, reporters pressed spokesman Federico Lombardi...
Pope Benedict to Change Conclave Rules?

BBC | February 20

Pope Benedict XVI is considering changes to Catholic Church rules which may speed up the process to select his successor, the Vatican says. A spokesman said the pope may issue a decree in the next few days regarding the conclave, the gathering of cardinals to choose the next pontiff. …

Under current rules the conclave should not start before March 15, but there has been pressure to bring it forward. Church officials want a successor to be in place before the start of Holy Week on March 24, the most important event in the Christian calendar. …

Vatican spokesman Father Federico Lombardi said the pope was considering changes to two documents approved by his predecessor, but did not specify the possible alterations.

One document governs the period during which the papacy is vacant, the other gives details of the running of the conclave.

The spokesman said he did not know whether this would mean the conclave would be held earlier than anticipated. But the BBC’s Rome correspondent Alan Johnston says the possibility of bringing it forward is being widely discussed at the Vatican. …

Why Did the Pope Resign?

THETRUMPET.COM | February 24

Why did the pope resign? There are many leaders and media personalities that feel certain that they know, but very few of them do. That is because they don’t understand the history of the Holy Roman Empire or Bible prophecy. You can understand why the pope resigned and what his main goal really is.

money laundering. It has also been criticized for a lack of transparency. Expect Benedict’s successor to make similar decisions that will further integrate the Catholic Church with the German-dominated European Union. For more on this subject, read “Pope Benedict XVI Has Resigned, Now What?”

Euro crisis brings down Bulgaria’s government

Bulgaria’s government resigned February 20 after protests triggered by rising energy prices. “The people gave us power, and today we are returning it,” said Prime Minister Bojko Borisov, just a day after insisting he would not step down. “I will not participate in a government under which police are beating people,” he said. “Every drop of blood is a shame for us.” Bulgaria’s currency, the lev, is pegged to the euro. Bulgaria aimed to join the euro in 2015. While the protests had other contributing factors, much of the country’s problems stem from this euro peg, and so are an extension of the euro crisis. The social problems this crisis caused combined with local factors to bring down the government. It’s a process that has happened several times, and it is a process that will continue while much of Europe has staggeringly high unemployment rates. For more information, see our article “Unemployment: Europe’s Next Crisis.”

EU seeks to strengthen ties with Africa

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso met with the Chairman of the African Union (AU) last Wednesday to emphasize the importance of strengthening EU-AU ties. “As President of the European Commission, the strengthening of the relations between the European Union and Africa is one of my top political priorities,” he told journalist after the meeting. Barroso stressed European commitment to the economic development of African nations and sited the EU intervention in Mali as an example of joint EU-AU security policy. Expect an emerging European Empire to continue pushing south and east into North Africa and the Middle East.

Click to Play
Saudi Arabia Tops German Arms Trade

**THE LOCAL | February 22**

German weapons exports to Persian Gulf states more than doubled between 2011 and 2012, with Saudi Arabia by far the biggest buyer, according to … *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newspaper.

The states of Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which form the Gulf cooperation council, spent between them €1.42 billion ($1.87 billion) on German arms in 2012.

This was a huge increase from the 2011 figure of €570 million ($750 million). The information was released by the Economy Ministry in response to a written parliamentary question submitted by the socialist Left party, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* reported on Friday.

The biggest arms customer of the region was Saudi Arabia which spent €1.24 billion ($1.63 billion) in 2012 alone—nine times the amount it spent on German weapons the year before.

German business with Saudi Arabia is highly contentious because of the kingdom’s poor domestic human rights record and its intervention in neighboring Bahrain two years ago to help the government there put down protests.

“The Gulf states continue to arm themselves, and the government has absolutely no compunction about arming them to the teeth,” said Jan van Aken, an M.P. from The Left party.

He said the fact that Saudi Arabia was by far the leading customer for the German arms export industry clearly showed “that the most grave human rights abuses are obviously no longer any reason to refuse exports.”

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**W  IN BRIEF**

- **Russia and China oppose military intervention in North Korea**
  Moscow and Beijing said Friday that they would oppose any foreign military intervention in North Korea over its nuclear test last week. The two nations’ foreign ministers gave the obligatory denunciation of the test but said any action against Pyongyang had to be agreed at the United Nations, where Russia and China wield veto power. North Korea’s test, its third since 2006, provoked warnings from the United States and others that fresh sanctions could be imposed on the hermit nation. And with Russia and China firmly opposed to any forceful solution to the North Korean threat, sanctions will likely remain the only deterrent to the North—and recent history proves that it is no deterrent at all. Russian and Chinese leaders use their UN veto power to protect the regime in Pyongyang because a rogue North Korea serves their expansionist ambitions, both within the region and in the global arena. North Korea’s ideologies and ambitions align perfectly with the top global priority to Russia and China: undermining the U.S.

- **Russia and China boosting ties**
  The upcoming visit to Russia by Chinese President Xi Jinping will inject new momentum into the two nations’ bond, China’s Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi said Wednesday during a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. Putin said Xi’s visit will be “a major event” in bilateral ties between the two countries, and said he expects it to yield significant achievements. No date for Xi’s visit has yet been announced. China-Russia ties have reached a new stage, thanks to joint efforts made by leaders of the two nations, Yang said. “Russia is willing to make joint efforts with China in further promoting bilateral relations to a new level,” Putin said. During the visit, several cooperation agreements will be signed, and advances are to be made in sectors including innovation and high-tech, with the two countries hoping to achieve $100 billion in bilateral trade by 2015. Feng Yujun, director of the Institute of Russian Studies at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said “China and Russia’s enhanced coordination is very significant for maintaining regional stability and world peace, especially during a time when the world order is restructuring.” As the world order continues to restructure, expect these Asian giants to draw nearer and nearer to each other.

- **‘North Korea, You’ve Been Bad’**
  North Korea detonated a nuclear weapon on February 12 as part of its ongoing nuclear testing. The international community responded with words of condemnation. North Korea replied saying if the U.S. “complicates the situation, we will be forced to take out stronger, second and third responses …” This demonstrates the vicious cycle underway. North Korea conducts military tests, the West increases sanctions on the impoverished nation, then the North announces more tests in retaliation to the sanctions.
Not fighting Back
Ralph Peters, NEW YORK POST  |  February 20

This week, a cutting-edge security firm in Virginia, Mandiant, reported that it had traced major cyber-attacks on 140 U.S. and other Western targets back not merely to China but to a specific Shanghai high-rise belonging to Chinese military intelligence.

Mandiant did splendid detective work at the unclassified level. But the situation’s even worse. Exasperated government workers tell me we should be terrified at what the Chinese already have done to us.

The Chinese government has hack-attacked our military, other branches of government, the defense industry, our energy infrastructure, telecommunications, hi-tech research and basic manufacturing.

According to the U.S. International Trade Commission, Chinese intellectual property theft cost the United States $48 billion in 2009, as well as taking away two million jobs. Since then, the amount of theft has worsened, so the total loss is likely around $300 billion. But U.S. companies, afraid that making their losses public will shake consumer confidence, won’t go public with their outrage.

Our military and intelligence services know the situation has gone beyond the Chinese preparing for cyber-war: Beijing’s already waging war against us.

It’s not that we can’t fight back. We have stunning, close-held capabilities to respond with punishing cyber-strikes of our own. We have the intelligence. We have the targets.

But the order never comes.

We’re bleeding money, government secrets, technology secrets, corporate strategies—and seem to have suffered trial attacks on our critical infrastructure. Why won’t the Obama administration do anything to retaliate against Chinese cyber-assaults?

“‘I believe one key end-time Bible prophecy could well be fulfilled through … cyberterrorism … ‘They have blown the trumpet, even to make all ready; but none goeth to the battle: for my wrath is upon all the multitude thereof’ (Ezekiel 7:14). The trumpet of war is to be blown in Israel—mainly America and Britain. It seems everybody is expecting our people to go into battle, but the greatest tragedy imaginable occurs! Nobody goes to battle—even though the trumpet is blown! Will it be because of computer terrorism?’”

—Gerald Flurry, Trumpet, May 2005

Playing defense doesn’t cut it. The Chinese won’t throttle back until they feel pain. Serious pain.

There are four possible reasons for President Obama’s inaction—only one of them faintly valid:

*Our own businessmen put profit over patriotism.* The minority of U.S.-based corporations that make money in (or off of) China form an influential lobby in Washington. It was bad enough when outsourcing dumped hardworking Americans out on the street, but arguing that we shouldn’t respond to Chinese attacks is greed bordering treason.

*Imaginary legal concerns paralyze this administration.* … We are under attack. Every day, around the clock. And our president seems afraid that Chinese spies are going to sue us.

*Team Obama just has other priorities.* … Obama came to office with no serious interest in foreign policy, but a highly charged domestic agenda. And foreign policy has bewildered, befuddled and bloodied his presidency …. He just wants foreign problems to disappear.

*We fear a massive cyber-attack.* This is the only remotely valid reason for responding carefully, but inaction merely worsens the prospect of disasters to come. And the administration is doing precious little to improve our defenses in the meantime.

The more complex a socio-economic system becomes, the more vulnerable it is to any kind of attack. … An African village wouldn’t suffer much from a cyber-attack; a Chinese town would feel it, but not severely. An American city would shut down.

Which means you can’t play tit-for-tat and let the Chinese continue to escalate. You have to hit their military and intelligence computer networks with shocking force — demonstrating what we could do to their showcase cities, if they don’t behave. …

If you don’t stand up to the bully, the bully keeps taking your lunch money.

AFRICA/LATIN AMERICA

March Against Gay Rights
RUSSIA TODAY  |  February 20

Gathering in front of San Juan’s Capitol building, hundreds of thousands of Christian Puerto Ricans stopped traffic while defending “traditional marriage” and protesting against the idea of granting gay couples legal rights.

[While some simply rallied against the idea of same-sex marriage, many were opposed to granting any rights to gay couples—including protections against violence. …

“It is a measure of justice and a desire that all citizens have equal access to protection from assault, intimidation, or potential domestic violence in
their relationships,” Puerto Rican Sen. Luis Vega Ramos told reporters last Thursday.

But in Puerto Rico, massive opposition to the move could prevent gay couples from receiving any sort of protections. The wave of protesters, blaring gospel music and brandishing large posters, alleged that the proposed legislation would discriminate against the church.

“We are concerned that laws will be created to discriminate against the church. … We are concerned that public education will be used to change our children, presenting them with behaviors their parents don’t think are correct,” said Pastor Cesar Vazquez Muñiz, a spokesman of Puerto Rico for the Family, in an interview with El Vocero. “This demonstration tells the government that there are things that they cannot touch, and those are marriage and family.” …

Monday’s protest was the largest anti-gay gathering in the history of the U.S. commonwealth. …

Democrats Want to Stop ‘Sequester’

WASHINGTON POST  |  February 20

With nine days to go before $85 billion in automatic federal spending cuts begin, some Democrats are calling on Republican leaders to reconvene the House immediately and find a way to avert the spending reductions known as “sequester.” …

“This is an unnecessary self-inflicted wound on the United States economy. Congress should come back to Washington to fix the problem,” said Rep. Rob Andrews (D-N.J.), whose district is home to several government contracting firms. “The Republicans are off in their districts, some are off on vacation … and these impending layoffs are only nine days away,” Andrews said. …

Rep. Bobby Scott (D-Va.), whose Tidewater-area district is home to federal agencies, military installations and dozens of major military contractors, said a local economist told him that the economic setbacks from sequester would rival the recession in 2008 and 2009.

“Being on recess during this is absurd,” Scott said, adding later: “We should be at work. It’s going to be hard. If you want to have a substitute for a $1.2 trillion sequester, you have to come up with some alternative that’s not as bad as the sequester. … You can’t decide this in a one- or two-day session. We need to be at work, we need to be working on a solution.” …

Britain ‘On the Brink’ of Energy Crisis

TELEGRAPH  |  February 19

Households must prepare for a sharp rise in energy bills within two years as Britain comes “dangerously” close to power shortages, the chief executive of Ofgem has warned.

The country would become more reliant on foreign gas to generate electricity as European Union pollution laws meant the dirtiest coal-fired stations had to shut, said Alistair Buchanan, the regulator’s outgoing head.

He pointed out that gas was already 60 percent more expensive in countries such as Japan that relied on imports. It was impossible to predict how high bills could go for British households, he said.

Ministers admitted that Britain faced a “looming energy gap” but blamed the previous government for agreeing to shut coal plants too quickly. Nick Clegg, the deputy prime minister, admitted that consumers could feel a “pinch” starting within two years. The government was fighting to “keep the lights on,” he insisted.

Mr. Buchanan warned that the “near crisis” would occur between 2015 and 2018, pushing up bills. Blackouts were “not likely” but there would be a “double squeeze” on energy prices. …

Mr. Buchanan told the BBC that nuclear power, many wind farms and clean coal technology would not be available until after 2020. “So we’ll lean on gas, and gas will account for about 60 percent of our power station needs instead of 30 percent as it does today,” he said. “And in order to get hold of that gas we’re going to
Where Have All the Babies Gone?

MORE AND more Americans are childless by choice. But what makes sense for the individual may spell disaster for the country as a whole.

Sitting around a table at a hookah bar in New York’s East Village with three women and a gay man, all of them in their 20s and 30s and all resolved to remain childless, a few things quickly became clear: First, for many younger Americans and especially those in cities, having children is no longer an obvious or inevitable choice. Second, many of those opting for childlessness have legitimate, if perhaps selfish, reasons for their decision.

Postfamilial America is in ascendancy as the fertility rate among women has plummeted, since the 2008 economic crisis and the Great Recession that followed, to its lowest level since reliable numbers were first kept in 1920. That downturn has put the U.S. fertility rate increasingly in line with those in other developed economies—suggesting that even if the economy rebounds, the birthrate may not. For many individual women considering their own lives and careers, children have become a choice, rather than an inevitable milestone—and one that comes with more costs than benefits. …

Until recently that decrepitude has seemed oceans away, as America’s open spaces, sprawling suburbs, openness to immigrants, and relatively religious culture helped keep our population young and growing. But attitudes are changing here as well. A plurality of Americans—46 percent—told Pew in 2009 that the rising number of women without children “makes no difference one way or the other” for our society.

These changes are not theoretical or inconsequential. … As younger Americans individually eschew families of their own, they are contributing to the ever growing imbalance between older retirees—basically their parents—and working-age Americans, potentially propelling both into a spiral of soaring entitlement costs and diminished economic vigor and creating a culture marked by hyperindividualism and dependence on the state as the family unit erodes. …

American marriage is faltering—and the baby is being thrown out with the bath water. Forty-four percent of millennials agree that marriage is becoming “obsolete.” And even among those who support tying the knot (including many of those who say it’s obsolete), just 41 percent say children are important for a marriage—down from 65 percent in 1990. It was the only factor to show a significant decline. … On the flip side of the coin, the percentage of adults who disagreed with the contention that people without children “lead empty lives” has shot up, to 59 percent in 2002 from 39 percent in 1988. …

Related: Why Marriage—Soon Obsolete?

If Walmart Shoppers Are Broke—We’re All in Trouble

BUSINESS INSIDER | February 19

Walmart’s leaked e-mails could be just the beginning of bad news for the retail industry.

The e-mails, leaked by Bloomberg, revealed that Walmart executives were freaking out because people weren’t shopping as much.

But there’s a fundamental problem that seems to be spreading throughout the discount industry as a whole: Customers are broke.

Related: “European Energy: Role Reversal”

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Related: “European Energy: Role Reversal”

Hate Preacher Says Mooch Off State

DAILY MAIL | February 17

A controversial Muslim cleric who lives off benefits is urging his followers to also sponge off UK taxpayers by claiming their “jihadseeker’s allowance.”

Anjem Choudary, who in the past has planned to disrupt the minute’s silence on Remembrance Sunday, also openly mocked hard-working Britons,
calling them “slaves.”

The Sun newspaper secretly filmed him saying Islam will overrun Europe, David Cameron and Barack Obama should be killed and calling the Queen “ugly.”

But today he said he had been “joking” and his words had been misconstrued. He also maintained that Osama bin Laden was his “hero.”

The father-of-four takes home more than £25,000 (US$38,000) a year in benefits and lives in a £320,000 ($480,000) house in Leytonstone, East London.

He told a crowd of around 30 fanatics: “People will say, ‘Ah, but you are not working.’ But the normal situation is for you to take money from the kuffar (non-Muslim). So we take Jihadseeker’s Allowance. You need to get support.”

In another video a grinning Choudary is recorded telling his disciples that it is justifiable to take money from non-believers.

He said: “The normal situation is to take money from the kuffar. You work, give us the money, Allahu Akhbar (God is great). Hopefully there’s no one from the DSS listening to this.”

He also called Mr. Cameron, Mr. Obama and the leaders of Pakistan and Egypt the “shaitan,” or devil, and said he wanted them to be killed.

Choudary spoke glowingly of the 9/11 attacks and urged his followers to take money from non-believers. He also called Mr. Cameron, Mr. Obama and the leaders of Pakistan and Egypt the “shaitan,” or devil, and said he wanted them to be killed.

Choudary spoke glowingly of the 9/11 attacks and urged his followers to have “hate” in their hearts for core British concepts like democracy, freedom of religion.

The rise of populism can be seen in the Middle East, similar trends cause revolutions. People can be suppressed for a long time, but if they can’t feed themselves, they revolt. …

For those that believe currency debasement is the appropriate way to escape a depression, keep in mind that the Great Depression provided a transition to World War II. Currency wars fought in the first half of the 20th century tended to be a result of fiscal policy. For example, in 1925, the UK returned to the gold standard at pre-World War I levels, although the UK could ill afford it. In 1931, Britain was forced to depart from the gold standard again. Japan suspended the gold standard in 1917, returned to it in early 1930, only to depart from it again in late 1931. In 1934, the U.S. dollar was devalued by 40 percent when an ounce of gold was officially priced at $35 an ounce, up from $20.67 an ounce. Exchange rates caught up with reality.

That may well be true for the next quarterly earnings report, but ignores that their competitive position may be weakening. The clearest evidence of this is the increased vulnerability to takeovers from abroad. As the value of the U.S. dollar has been eroding, for example, Chinese companies are increasingly buying U.S. assets. The U.S. is selling its family silver in an effort to support consumption. …

Currency debasement is not just bad for the corporate world: It’s particularly painful for citizens. …

The natural consequence of currency debasement is inflation, i.e., loss of real purchasing power; the two forces meet at the gas pump: as a currency loses value, commodities—all else equal—become pricier when valued in that currency. …

Currency debasement fosters growing income and wealth inequality and diverging political reactions, e.g., the Tea Party movement on the political right and the Occupy Wall Street movement on the political left. The rise of populism can be seen in the rise of Twitter: We sometimes quip that politicians that can distill their political message into a tweet have a better chance of being elected these days. Except that we are wrong: It’s not a joke.

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5,000 Fatherless IVF Children

The requirement that fertility doctors consider a child’s need for a male role model before giving IVF treatment facilitated insemination was axed. It was felt that the law discriminated against singletons and lesbian couples. Since 2008, the total number of babies created without a father has almost quadrupled from 312 to 1,124. …

Last night Norman Wells, from the pressure group Family and Youth Concern, said: “It was always inevitable that removing the legal requirement to consider the need of a child for a father would result in a rise in fatherless families. We should be no less concerned about the creation of children deprived of a father than we are concerned about other forms of deprivation suffered by children.

Research demonstrates that the absence of fathers has adverse consequences for children, for mothers and for society. Fathers are not an optional extra.

“Not only will children suffer as a result of deliberately being brought into the world without a father in the home, but the law is sending out the
dangerous message that fatherhood amounts to no more than sperm donation.”

Andrea Williams, chief executive of the Christian Legal Center, said: “Our approach to ivf and donor insemination should take account of the child’s needs, not just the desires of women who want children. Children have a right to a father as well as a mother. We can’t just airbrush dads out of the picture. They are essential for children’s wellbeing … we shouldn’t be intentionally creating circumstances where children miss out on having a dad.”

Signs the Economy Is Heading for Trouble

THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE | February 20

1. Freight shipment volumes have hit their lowest level in two years, and freight expenditures have gone negative for the first time since the last recession.
2. The average price of a gallon of gasoline has risen by more than 50 cents over the past two months.

3. Reader’s Digest, once one of the most popular magazines in the world, has filed for bankruptcy.
4. Atlantic City’s newest casino, Revel, has just filed for bankruptcy. It had been hoped that Revel would help lead a turnaround for Atlantic City.
5. According to the Conference Board, consumer confidence in the U.S. has hit its lowest level in more than a year.
6. In 2012, global cell phone sales posted their first decline since the end of the last recession.
7. We appear to be in the midst of a “retail apocalypse.” It is being projected that Sears, J.C. Penney, Best Buy and RadioShack will also close hundreds of stores by the end of 2013.
8. If Congress does not do anything and “sequestration” goes into effect on March 1, the Pentagon says that approximately 800,000 civilian employees will be facing mandatory furloughs.
9. For the entire year of 2012, U.S. gross domestic product growth was only about 1.5 percent. According to Art Cashin, every time gdp growth has fallen this low for an entire year, the U.S. economy has always ended up going into a recession.
10. The global economy overall is really starting to slow down.
11. Corporate insiders are dumping enormous amounts of stock right now. Do they know something that we don’t?
12. Even some of the biggest names on Wall Street are warning that we are heading for an economic collapse.

Music Ability Helps Reading

WALL STREET JOURNAL | February 18

Playing a musical instrument from a young age appears to create new pathways in the brain that process written words and letters and may help children with reading disorders such as dyslexia, says a study in the journal Neuropsychologia. Musicians generally outperform non-musicians on cognitive tests, but little is known about the effects of reading musical notes on the brain’s circuitry as it relates to reading, researchers said.

Fifteen professional musicians who had played an instrument since childhood and 15 control subjects who couldn’t read music participated in two experiments in Milan. Subjects were 26 to 31 years old. In one experiment, subjects pressed a button if they recognized the notes E, F, G, A and B (mi, fa, sol, la and ti on the musical scale) which randomly appeared in 300 short musical scores flashed on a computer screen. In the other experiment, they pressed the button when they spotted the letters B, G, L, M and S in 300 randomly selected words. An electroencephalogram (eeg) measured brain-wave activity.

Musicians recognized notes significantly faster than controls and letters only slightly faster. Musicians made fewer errors in both experiments. But eeg results showed striking differences. In musicians, reading musical notes and words activated both the left and right sides of the brain, whereas in controls, only the left side responded to words and the right side to notes.

Language is normally a left-brain function and music a right-brain function. The involvement of the right side in a typically left-sided function probably resulted from reading music, researchers said. Musical training may be quite helpful for children struggling to read, they said.
The government not only is hiding its legal “justification” for depriving a U.S. citizen of his constitutional protections—and his life—it is also fighting to stop the legislative and judicial branches from supervising or regulating the strikes.

“The paper’s sweeping claims of executive power are audacious,” University of Notre Dame law professor Mary Ellen O’Connell said. “The paper denies Congress and the federal courts a role in authorizing the killings—or even reviewing them afterwards.”

As scary as it is that the president and “informed, high-level officials” are playing God with Predator drones and Hellfire missiles, if you examine the Justice Department white paper in detail, the implications are even more terrifying.

The document’s language is so vague, convoluted and contradictory that it could mean whatever the president’s high-level men want it to mean.

For example, the white paper says an “informed” official must think the target poses an “imminent” threat to American lives or interests before being executed. Not only does the document contain no definition of what qualifies an official as being “informed,” it completely redefines the concept of “imminence.” The government does not have to have information about an imminent attack—or even a specific plot or attack—officials just have to suspect that a person is engaging in an effort to harm Americans. The targets don’t even have to be part of al Qaeda or any other “terrorist” organization that America is officially at war with. They can be people who are associating with known al Qaeda operatives.

When the memo says execution is permitted when capture is infeasible, the document later redefines “infeasible” to mean any situation where there is “undue risk” to U.S. personnel. The document doesn’t define what constitutes “undue risk.” It does say that in such infeasible situations targeted killings (supposedly by drones or air strikes) are acceptable if a foreign country refuses to turn over suspects or grant permission for an on-land operation.

But if we let the DOJ white paper supersede the Constitution of the United States of America, does it matter if the high-level officials are targeting someone in a foreign country, or could they also kill Americans here at home? Lawmakers asked this question to John Brennan, the president’s nominee for CIA director, during his confirmation hearings: Has the government given itself the authority to kill American citizens on American soil without any due process of law? Brennan refused to answer. He equivocated and demurred. Then he admitted that he thinks there are no geographic limits to where Americans can be targeted and killed as part of America’s war on terror.

In a February 14 interview, the president was asked the same question: Can the government override the Constitution and kill Americans on U.S. soil without due process?

Again, no dogmatic yes or no answer. The best the president could manage was that he doesn’t intend to do this because the situation in America is different. It all rides on what the president intends.

Why isn’t the media all over this? Why isn’t every congressman and senator all over this? This is exactly the kind of government overreach that President Obama campaigned on ending.

Democrat Jennifer Granholm, the former governor of Michigan, explains, “If this was Bush, I think that we would all be more up in arms .... But this is President Obama we are talking about—and “we trust the president,” she said.

MSNBC’s Chris Matthews admitted he was uncomfortable with the program, but he decided it is justifiable because current CIA Director Leon Panetta clearly agonizes over his decisions and thus can be trusted to make good decisions about who to kill. “I think Leon is a conscientious guy,” he said. “He goes to church every day. I think sometimes you have to do things that are not nice.”

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham thinks the kill program is a good idea too. He said he is planning on introducing a resolution to praise Obama for the assassination program. “Every member of Congress needs to get on board,” Graham said.

Even Fox News backed President Obama’s constitutional overreach. Erick Erickson wrote, “We must trust that the president and his advisers, when they see a gathering of al Qaeda from the watchful eye of a drone, are going to make the right call and use appropriate restraint and appropriate force to keep us safe.”

America is putting a lot of trust in a few “informed, high-level officials.”

America has turned down a dangerous road. It is letting presidents and “high-level officials” administer powers of life and death. It is admitting that there is basically one thing that will keep the government from abusing this lethal power: its trust in the intentions of the president and his men. Worst of all, America is not only allowing its administration to commit these actions, it is showing that it does not care if it trashes the Constitution to do so.

Six thousand years of human history show that men cannot be trusted. President Obama is not the first leader to ask for trust in exchange for assurances. Once men gain that kind of power, it never ends well.

As John Adams warned in 1792, “There is danger from all men. The only maxim of a free government ought to be to trust no man living with power to endanger the public.”

The Constitution is designed to prevent any president from ever becoming a tyrant. It is designed to protect Americans’ freedom from the intentions of a high-level man. The framers of the Constitution had a deep understanding of human nature. They knew it had to be restrained by a supreme law of the land. They had seen what happened when an authoritarian abused his subjects.

Without that supreme law, eventually all that is left is every man doing what is right in his own eyes.

America’s supreme law—the Constitution—is being pushed aside. Ostensibly, this is to make us safer. Ironically, without law, the only two options are anarchy and tyranny.

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