



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on February 22, 2012

Right or Wrong? Ron Paul Says America Is Turning to Fascism

CNN's Candy Crowley [asked](#) Rep. Paul about his remarks the next day: "Do you really think that the U.S. now has a fascist system? And point to me, you know, some examples of that."

Rep. Paul said that the United States did not yet have all the trappings of fascism, "No, I don't think we do. But I worry about it a lot.... Why I'm getting more nervous is because fascism usually suggests an authoritarian and ruthless rule of government when we think of Mussolini and Hitler." The Congressman and obstetrician then went on to [give some examples](#) of what he believed were recent American practice of some of the principles of fascism:



Just look at the bailouts, the middle class didn't get it.... There's a coalition of big business and big government.... But just think of this change in civil liberties that nobody wants to talk about. The arrest of Americans citizens now by the military and held indefinitely without a trial. And people aren't concerned about it. So yes, if we have economic chaos, something like what's in Greece, or much worse, yes, they could clamp down on us. So this is why I do worry about it. But we don't have this now.

But are these examples evidence of adoption of the principles of fascism in the United States? To determine this, we must compare current U.S. policy to the policies of Benito Mussolini's Italy, where fascism was created. And the best source for analysis of fascism is the classical liberal John T. Flynn, whose 1944 [book](#) *As We Go Marching*, analyzed the economic, political, and military policies of Mussolini and Hitler. Flynn summarized the [findings in his book](#) this way:

As we survey the whole scene in Italy, therefore, we may now name all the essential ingredients of fascism. It is a form of social organization

1. In which the government acknowledges no restraint upon its powers — totalitarianism.
2. In which this unrestrained government is managed by a dictator — the leadership principle.
3. In which the government is organized to operate the capitalist system and enable it to function under an immense bureaucracy.
4. In which the economic society is organized on the syndicalist model, that is by producing groups formed into craft and professional categories under supervision of the state.
5. In which the government and the syndicalist organizations operate the capitalist society on the planned, autarchial principle.
6. In which the government holds itself responsible to provide the nation with adequate purchasing power by public spending and borrowing.



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7. In which militarism is used as a conscious mechanism of government spending, and
8. In which imperialism is included as a policy inevitably flowing from militarism as well as other elements of fascism.

At first glance, few of those policies are being implemented in the United States. But a deeper look reveals that all of the principles have been admitted under the Obama administration, even if the exercise of all of these principles of fascism has not been regular:

1. No restraint on powers of government

President Obama has [asserted — and exercised — the right to kill American citizens](#) without trial or any other checks or balances mandated by the [Fifth and Sixth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution](#): in the cases of Anwar al-Awlaki; his 16-year-old son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki; and Samir Khan, the President ordered them killed in two separate drone bombings. Of course, if the President can kill any American; he has no real restraint on his powers. That's why the [U.S. Constitution](#) restricts the President's ability to kill to a temporary provision for stopping an imminent attack during a time when Congress is not in session, and instead reserves to Congress the exclusive power to "declare war" and "punish Piracies and Felonies committed on the high Seas, and Offenses against the Law of Nations" and "make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces."

Though the President is not currently locking up all of his political opponents and political dissidents within the United States, there is no constitutional principle or provision that differentiates between the assassination of American citizens abroad without trial and the assassination of Americans at home. The only difference between the Obama administration and Mussolini's fascist Italy is not a principle, but rather that the Obama administration has not been regularly exercising the power it asserts for itself. It's worth noting that Mussolini did not acquire genuine dictatorial power at the time of his ascent to power during the 1922 march on Rome, but rather *Il Duce* consolidated his dictatorial power in a series of jumps over a decade that removed the Italian constitution's meager checks and balances.

2. A dictator — the leadership principle

The leadership principle was defined by Adolf Hitler using the following language in his [book](#) *Mein Kampf*: "At every man's side there stand councilors, indeed, but one man decides," Hitler proclaimed. "Responsibility can and must be borne always only by one man and thus he alone can and must have the authority and right of command."

President Obama has exercised the leadership principle (German translation: *Führerprinzip*) in the cases of the al-Awlakis and Samir Khan above, and Congress has consented to give the President power to detain American citizens in prison indefinitely without trial under the [National Defense Authorization Act of 2012](#). Again, the President and the legislative branch are agreed in principle upon establishing *Führerprinzip* in America, but they have yet to exercise it *en masse* on the scale that was used in Italy and Germany.

3. An immense bureaucracy

President Obama and a compliant Congress have consented to fund huge bureaucracies under a federal government that is [currently spending 20 percent more than what it spent four years ago](#). The bureaucracy wields a number of tools that bribe, subsidize, and threaten industry into producing the products and providing the services that government favors. Indeed, it was government subsidies of the housing market through loan guarantees from Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, suppressed interest rates through the Federal Reserve Bank, and subprime loans through the Community Reinvestment Act that [created the 2008 housing and financial crisis](#) that brought on the current high unemployment levels.

**4. Craft and industry regulations.**

While the United States has long had statewide quasi-government regulation of various professions, such as the state bar associations that regulate the legal professions and the medical board that regulates doctors, the regulation of the financial industry and others through Sarbanes-Oxley and Frank-Dodd have brought regulation of industry to new heights. “Public-private partnerships” have been all the rage since at least the Clinton administration. However, the United States does not generally force industries into guilds as Mussolini did, guilds that controlled far more aspects of corporate decision-making than our government currently does.

5. A centrally planned economy

Flynn noted that “Mussolini accepted completely the principle that the capitalist economic system ought to be managed — planned and directed — under the supervision of the state.” The federal government today believes it must pick winners and losers in the marketplace as well, as evidenced by the Wall Street bailouts, the auto bailouts, and subsidies to “green” companies such as [Solyndra](#). Presidential State of the Union addresses from Clinton, Bush, and Obama have been wish-lists for central state planning of the economy for two decades.

6. Deficit spending and economic “stimulus”

Flynn wrote that “Mussolini had denounced ‘demagogic finance’ and promised to balance the budget. However, he lost little time in turning to the time-worn favorite of Ministers — the unbalanced budget.... As a matter of fact Mussolini never balanced a budget.” The United States is spending in deficit at the highest level — and over the longest period of time — in its history. America will finish up its fourth straight year of more than a trillion-dollar deficit in fiscal 2012, and the President’s budget proposal for fiscal 2013 may go over \$1 trillion again if the economy recedes back into recession as Europe and Japan already have.

Mussolini also spent money freely on what today is called “infrastructure” projects designed to stimulate economic growth, Flynn [wrote](#). “Money was spent on highways, schools, public projects of various kinds, and on the draining of the Pontine Marshes.” Recent U.S. Presidents have done precisely the same kind of deficit-financed “stimulus” spending, except that they are filling swamps back up under environmental regulations rather than draining them.

7. Militarism

Militarism is a loaded term in the American political lexicon, but it simply means attacking nations that haven’t attacked you. In short, it means any war that isn’t a war of defense. The U.S. government fully and openly adopted the oxymoronic concept of “preventative war” since the second Bush administration. But it has also militarily attacked a number of nations since the elder Bush administration that didn’t attack the United States first, under the guise of humanitarian missions, including Panama (1989), Kuwait (1991), Somalia (1992-93), Bosnia (1992-96), Haiti (1994-95), Kosovo (1998-99), Iraq (1991, 2003-11), Libya (2011), Pakistan (2005-present), Yemen (2010-present), etc.

Flynn also noted that military spending had become a means of economic stimulus under the fascist economic system and that military spending under both Mussolini’s and Hitler’s fascist regimes reached new heights. The United States currently spends more on its military than the next 10 biggest military budgets combined, and [almost as much as the rest of the world combined](#).

8. Imperialism

When Mussolini prevailed in his colonialist attack against Ethiopia in 1936, he proclaimed he had done it to stop Ethiopian terrorism against Italian military bases in neighboring Somalia. The invasion, he



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proclaimed, would lead to peace. Moreover, Italy would take Ethiopia into its colonial stewardship and bring it into the modern era. "People of the world, peace has been restored," he said from Rome announcing the end of the war, announcing a new beginning for Ethiopia.

The United States has also undergone a similar tutelage of what we have previously regarded as renegade nations, engaging in "nation-building," especially recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. These are not greatly dissimilar from the 20th-century colonialism that marked European empires. The United States supervised the selection of governments, adoption of their constitutions, and then ensured that dissident military factions opposed to the government were destroyed. The United States does not claim an empire by name, but our foreign policy is otherwise indistinguishable from that of an empire.

"Wherever you find a nation using all of these devices you will know that this is a fascist nation," Flynn [wrote](#). But a nation can still be tending in the direction of fascism if they employ a majority of these elements, Flynn stressed. "In proportion as any nation uses most of them you may assume it is tending in the direction of fascism. Because the brutalities committed by the fascist gangs, the suppressions of writers and statesmen, the aggressions of the fascist governments against neighbors make up the raw materials of news, the public is familiar chiefly with the dictator element in fascism and is only very dimly aware of its other factors. Dictatorship alone does not make a fascist state. The dictatorship of Russia, while following the usual shocking techniques of tyranny — the concentration camp and the firing squad — is very far from being a fascist dictatorship."

The relatively benign impact of fascist policies in the United States thus far (if one doesn't count the war dead, the economic crisis, or the looming economic debt crisis) is not necessarily an indication that the nature of America's ever-increasing slouch toward fascism will continue to be benign. Flynn [warned](#) that fascism must ultimately lead to government brutality. "Corporative control means regimentation of business which, when attempted, involves stern compliance measures which also provoke another powerful group of irritations and enmities. In the end the dictator must do things which the population does not like. Hence he must have power — power to subdue criticism and resistance. And this necessity for power grows by what it feeds on until nothing less than absolutism will do. And so the popular mind must be subjected to intense conditioning, and this calls for the positive and aggressive forms of propaganda."

Americans today equate fascism with the racism and anti-semitism of Adolf Hitler. But Flynn [noted](#) that Mussolini was not by his nature anti-semitic, and neither is fascism. "While Hitler denounces and persecutes the Jews, it was two Jews — Theodore Wolfi and Emil Ludwig — who acclaimed Mussolini, because the latter did not find it profitable to attack them. The central point of all this is that dictatorship is an essential instrument of fascism but that the other elements outlined here are equally essential to it as an institution. In different countries it may alter its attitudes on religion or literature or races or women or forms of education, but always it will be militaristic and imperialist dictatorship employing government debt and autarchy in its social structure." Mussolini did eventually persecute Jews in fascist Italy when his power had been overshadowed by his German ally in 1938 with his pronouncement of the *Manifesto of Race*, but initially as Italian dictator he had ridiculed the idea of racism.

And while the "Occupy" movement of 2011 focused upon the "right-wing" big business connections between Wall Street and government, Flynn [took pains to note](#) that fascism was a creation of the political Left. The myth that fascism is an offshoot of right-wing thought was prevalent even in Flynn's day, even though Mussolini had been a self-described socialist and continued to view himself as a man



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of the Left throughout his life. “The commonly accepted theory that fascism originated in the conspiracy of the great industrialists to capture the state will not hold,” Flynn wrote. “It originated on the Left. Primarily it gets its first impulses in the decadent or corrupt forms of socialism — from among those erstwhile socialists who, wearying of that struggle, have turned first to syndicalism and then to becoming saviors of capitalism, by adapting the devices of socialism and syndicalism to the capitalist state.”

Based upon the classical understanding of fascism, and current U.S. government policies that have adopted all the principles of fascism (if not the regular practice of all of them), Ron Paul does have a reason to be concerned. And so do all Americans.

Note: The full text of John T. Flynn’s classic book As We Go Marching is posted for free on the Ludwig Von Mises Institute’s website [here](#).

Photo of Benito Mussolini



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