

Wesley Clark's internment proposal: The specter of military dictatorship

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The statements made by retired four-star general and former NATO commander Wesley Clark to MSNBC News last Friday in support of placing “radicalized” and “disloyal” Americans in World War II-style internment camps must be taken as an urgent warning by the working class.

Clark, America's most prominent political general, was speaking not just for himself, but for powerful layers within the US military/intelligence apparatus and ruling oligarchy who fear the growth of social opposition and are preparing to defend their interests, no matter what the cost.

The event that prompted Clark's televised remarks was the recent killing of four Marines and one sailor at an armed forces recruiting center in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Clark's proposal for mass internment was advanced as a response to the so-called “self radicalized,” “lone wolf” phenomenon—labels that have been applied to a handful of terrorist incidents over the course of more than a decade. The vast majority of such “lone wolf” incidents have involved hapless and, in some cases, mentally disturbed individuals who were set up by FBI and police agent provocateurs.

If Clark's proposal were implemented, such “sting” operations and subsequent frame-up trials could be dispensed with, as the “self-radicalized” were identified by their thoughts, statements or Internet postings and summarily thrown into concentration camps.

The scale of his proposed response is so disproportionate to the actual threat—which has claimed far fewer victims than mass shootings carried out by individuals who have shown no sign of being “radicalized”—that it is impossible not to conclude that there are deeper and hidden motives and processes at work.

If one takes Clark's statements at their face value, the term “Orwellian” does not do them justice. “We have got

to identify people who are most likely to be radicalized,” he said in his television interview. “We've got to cut this off at the beginning.” In other words, the massive and ongoing surveillance of the American population must be intensified to identify potential radicals and jail them based on their alleged thoughts or expressions.

“In World War II, if someone supported Nazi Germany at the expense of the United States, we didn't say that was freedom of speech, we put him in a camp, they were prisoners of war,” he added.

Making the implications of his reasoning unmistakable, Clark continued: “If these people are radicalized and they don't support the United States and they are disloyal to the United States, as a matter of principle, fine. It's their right, and it's our right and obligation to segregate them from the normal community for the duration of the conflict.”

People are to be imprisoned in camps for the “duration” of the never-ending “war on terrorism” for being deemed “disloyal” or insufficiently supportive of the United States, a charge that could be leveled against anyone expressing opposition to US imperialist war abroad, police repression at home or even the profit interests of US corporations and banks.

There is no small irony in Clark citing supporters of Nazi Germany in World War II as a precedent for mass internment. Of course, the greatest number of those interned—some 110,000—were Japanese-Americans, imprisoned for nothing more than their national background in what is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest crimes against basic rights in US history.

More fundamentally, Clark's proposal is entirely in line with the actions of the Nazi regime after it came to power in 1933. Justifying its measures by invoking a non-existent threat of “terrorism,” the Nazis suspended democratic rights, including habeas corpus. The regime opened the first of its concentration camps at Dachau to

hold tens of thousands of political prisoners—socialists, trade unionists and others—deemed “disloyal” to the Third Reich.

Wesley Clark is no Adolf Hitler, but the measures he proposes are entirely in line with the actions taken by the Nazi regime.

Clark is far from a Rush Limbaugh-style media fulminator. Following his military career, he has become a leading figure in the Democratic Party and prominent supporter of presidential front-runner Hillary Clinton. He has had a lucrative career as an investment banker and heads Wesley K. Clark & Associates, an international consulting firm geared to the needs of the big oil companies, defense contractors and investment bankers. The firm touts Clark’s “reputation” and “relationships” as its main asset.

Moreover, the retired general is not the only one invoking internment camps. In his dissent to last month’s US Supreme Court decision legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide, Justice Clarence Thomas, responding to the majority’s argument that its decision would advance the “dignity” of same-sex couples, argued that the government could not take away dignity. He cited the mass imprisonment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, writing, “Those held in internment camps did not lose their dignity because the government confined them.”

The statement was greeted with astonishment from the media and outrage from survivors of the camps and other civil rights groups.

However, only last year, Thomas’ fellow right-wing justice, Antonin Scalia, referred to the high court’s 1944 decision upholding the legality of the mass internment camps during World War II—which has never been overturned—and commented that “you are kidding yourself if you think the same thing will not happen again.”

It would appear that the subject of internment camps is under intense and ongoing discussion within the top echelons of the state and the US ruling establishment.

Perhaps even more revealing is the corporate media’s stony silence in the face of Clark’s proposal for internment camps. Like other prominent media outlets, the *New York Times* published not a word on his statement, which came only days after the newspaper mocked as “paranoid” and “conspiracy theorists” residents of Texas who have expressed concern about Jade Helm 15, a seven-state exercise by the military’s elite Special Operations Command in which assassination,

detention and internment of civilians are all being practiced.

The alleged ubiquitous threat of terrorist attack is the pretext for, rather than the real motive behind, the extraordinary police state measures that have already been implemented—the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security, the enactment of the USA Patriot Act and wholesale spying on the population of the US and the entire planet, the creation of the Pentagon’s Northern Command overseeing the US itself, and the unceasing militarization of US police departments—as well as even more sweeping fascist-style measures like those proposed by Clark.

Over the past two years, beginning with the imposition of virtual martial law in Boston following the Boston Marathon bombings, military-police lockdowns have taken place in Ferguson, Missouri and Baltimore, Maryland.

At its heart, this process is driven by the insoluble contradiction between basic democratic rights and the unprecedented levels of social inequality and continuous eruptions of US militarism that are the sharpest expressions of the historic crisis of American capitalism.

The corporate and financial aristocracy is acutely aware of the immense chasm that separates it from the broad mass of working people and lives in thoroughly justified fear that the policies it is pursuing are sowing the seeds of social revolution. Clark’s statements are one more indication that the ruling establishment is preparing accordingly. The working class must do likewise. It must recognize that no section of the political establishment will defend basic democratic rights. That depends on the independent political organization and mobilization of the working class in the fight for socialism.



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