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71 Days to Prepare Before the First Executive Orders

William Gillis

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While presidents almost always expand the power of their office and of the government, Donald Trump is likely to enact a degree of barefisted authoritarianism the modern United States is totally unprepared for.

Even if the corrupt and limp political elites that have so far utterly failed to stand against him unexpectedly rally a steadfast resistance in Congress Trump will still enter office with the overwhelming backing of rank and file law enforcement. A strongman unburdened by any conditioning of social norms or sufficient intelligence to understand game theoretic constraints. A man who the NYTimes reported “privately muses about all the ways he will punish his enemies after Election Day.”

Never mind the wild geopolitical catastrophes as yet undreamed, those of us in the belly of the beast have more immediate concerns to look forward to. Trump’s promised “law and order” presidency would mean a Christmas list of presents for the police. Exploding budgets and the removal of any pretense of constraining oversight from the Justice Department. Every beat cop in the nation flush

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with the invigorating knowledge that the President of the United States has their back, with money, legal support, public support, and ultimately the Presidential Pardon. The full extent of what is possible is dark indeed, but even moderate predictions are dire. We cannot afford to plan for the best.

In 71 days Trump will begin turning the ICE into a military operation capable of the industrial-scale ethnic cleansing he promised repeatedly. He will certainly shirk on some promises, but even if his effectiveness at getting all the millions he targets falls short, he will not miss the opportunity to demonstrate power, even if that means something as obscene as the national guard standing openly in sanctuary cities.

In 71 days Trump will approach an FBI already coursing with his fervent supporters and tell them to go ahead and do whatever it takes to get the domestic terrorists that didn't vote for him. All the bored and overstaffed Joint Terrorism Taskforce offices the Bush administration left behind surveilling vegan potlucks will finally get to just bring the damn hippies in for questioning. The same pattern we've seen in countless countries when right-wing populists get into office will play out. Police raiding punk houses and roughing up anarchists for the sheer pleasure of it, finally able to assert their authority over those whose mere existence offends them. And this is the presidency when US police will be given drones with weapons.

In 71 days Trump will immediately turn his vindictive eye upon the media and every journalist he can get his fingers on. The press corp will be gutted and reporters will be threatened. The same tired procedure we've seen in dozens of other countries will arrive here overnight. The sort of regime where armed raids are used to conduct tax audits and incidentally bust up equipment. Trump's number one concern with the Supreme Court justices he'll stock it with will be — as always — their loyalty to him and their openness to allowing him to sue everyone for libel.

capable of acting while respecting the innate dissonance and diversity of subjective actors. The object now must be making a difference, not playing games of positioning and signalling, not focusing on personally feeling virtuous or wrapping ourselves in the comforting blankets of community. Local networks and face-to-face AFK ties will regrettably become all the more critical. Food security and basic needs infrastructure must be locked down. But most importantly we need robust networks and widely shared skills.

Many will continue chortling — flush with the ecstatic visceral delight of seeing a monster like Clinton bloodied, smug liberals distraught, and the vile establishment shaken to its foundations — mocking and unsympathetic to those foretelling cataclysm. But beware that most limited and inane sort of induction that presumes that what exists must necessarily exist. We have lived in but a tiny and incredibly unstable sliver of the full expanse of what is possible. And dystopian as our world already is there's a hell of a lot worse possible. There is no magic force that presumes things will continue ticking much as they always have. Such shallow comfortable thinking is incapable of seeing deeper troubles, the edge cases, and the barriers to the effective region of such normalcy.

We're looking down the barrel of a grim future — the violent reaction to the cosmopolitan complexities of global interconnection and the information era. Liberty is in retreat like few other moments in history. Around the globe numerous countries are falling to nationalism. The reassuring simplicity of authority and tribalism is a balm to the anxious and a virus that self-compounds via fear and brutality. There will be all the pressures in the world to let such crop up in the ranks of the opposition. But remember every anti-authoritarian resistance movement that has adopted or made deals with nationalism in response to nationalism has regretted it.

We live, as the curse goes, in interesting times. We have no idea how much turns on the next 71 days, how much of the future we can influence by hustling now, but we are far more likely to underestimate it than overestimate.

In 71 days Trump will inherit a vast surveillance apparatus of unparalleled scope in the world that will immediately be turned to his benefit against domestic adversaries or dissidents. He will empower those who have been stewing in outrage at their (meager) constraint. The US' torture program will escalate. Just because he can. Just for the kick of it. American citizens will end up in Guantanamo and black sites around the world, what barriers to this have previously stood will make no sense to Trump. It will not take long, all things considered, before such American torture subjects are not just Muslim.

In 71 days Trump will start asking what can be done about that whole unruly internet thing and all those losers spreading lies. A president already aligned with Russia and with less than zero compulsion to lecture about human rights or leverage the activists within other superpowers will inexorably build a unprecedented global collaboration against Tor and internet freedom. A unified coalition that most of our existing tools were not prepared for.

We will face an America probably more reactionary and authoritarian than Italy under Berlusconi but probably less authoritarian than Germany under Hitler. The proper analogues are probably modern Hungary and Romania. Authoritarian populist “law and order” regimes with some pretense of normal modern life, riven with empowered racists and neighborhood curbstompings. A broadly mobilized reactionary populace and a shattered and demoralized opposition.

To most it will be perfectly survivable, if objectionable. To many it will be an apocalypse.

We have 71 days to prepare. To bootstrap a radical infrastructure capable of enabling survival and resistance. For ourselves and for all those likely to be targeted.

On a personal level you can:

- Read on security culture, opsec (also), threat modeling, best practices and frequent problems.

- Get trained on tools of civil disobedience and street protests. From lockboxes to riot shield formations. Refamiliarize yourself with some basic activist skills
- Learn, adopt and spread crypto tools like Signal, Torbrowser, GPG, and full-disk-encryption. Everyone can use Signal and Tor. GPG and full-disk-encryption will help you the most in the face of raids, although GPG has a steep learning curve and disk encryption can require a reinstall of your operating system. Read up on the limits and optimal ways to use Signal and Tor. Check out the EFF's excellent guides for the basics. Read this list of other tools for a wider array of options, although beware that anything not in the EFF's guide is problematic. Download a copy of the Tails operating system and put it on a spare USB.
- Get a gun before dissidents and leftists with arrest records cease passing background checks. Learn about firearms if you're ignorant. Go to the range and practice. Work out and enroll in self-defense classes focused on surviving attacks from reactionary thugs in the streets.
- Familiarize yourself with how to use cryptocurrencies. Buy some prepaid phones with cash (don't activate them or keep them on near your house, don't give your actual info or call/logon using your actual devices when activating them). Buy cash cards.
- Buy and stockpile long-lasting emergency contraceptives and hormones that will likely be constrained. If you are trans get a letter from your physician that you're undergoing transition, and a court order/decreed with proof of your name change, as these are likely to become requisite in some areas and also highly curtailed.

- Get together with your closest friends and build affinity groups and networks of people capable of providing underground support.
- Possibly start purging your social media, electronic devices and the like. Find other ways to communicate serious issues and organize.
- Go to churches that do support work for undocumented people or provide sanctuary and start building personal ties.
- Set up text trees or use apps like Cell 411 and Bouy to help establish communications networks to deal with raids and checkpoints, to mobilize responses to attacks and pogroms.
- Get wifi routers, water, medical supplies, a month's supply of dry food, and a go bag. Set up small geocaches (buried resources/tools in waterproof containers you can reach if on the run).
- Train anyone and everyone you can in the above skills. Get at least a dozen of your friends to use Signal. Give a training in something else to larger numbers of people at least twice before the election.

Hackers need to shift gears towards building to just keep people in contact, to keep networks up and information flowing, in the face of unified global adversaries, a hostile legal regime to NGOs, and even possibly the shutting down of BGP or ISP infrastructure. The country should be treated as a disaster zone and mesh wifi networks built as fast as we humanly can, similarly the time to swap over to heavy focus on steganography and bootstrapping devices in a hostile landscape is now. Biohackers need to get DIY contraceptives and hormones flowing asap. Activists need to build coalitions