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Beware the Coming Fascist Counterattack

By Mike Tully

The solstice on the 20th of June, 2020 will usher in one of the most difficult and challenging summers in the history of the republic. The spring of 2020 has not been a picnic, with COVID-19 triggering widespread hospitalizations, tens of thousands of deaths and the worst economic calamity since the Great Depression. But Spring may be the warm-up act for a dangerous and volatile summer of malcontent.

The murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd and Rayshard Brooks are moving the United States to address systemic racism and police brutality. With growing awareness that America needs to honestly address its racial past and present, with hope that police brutality against all Americans, but especially people of color, will be dealt with, with rejection of symbols of the Confederacy, with the Supreme Court declaring protections for the LGBTQ community and DACA recipients, many believe we are in a Spring of American Enlightenment.

Are we? Consider the “Prague Spring” of 1968 when a progressive leader took charge in Czechoslovakia. Jan Kavan, who led student protests in 1968 and later became the Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic in 1993, was euphoric at the time. “Throughout my life, this was the period I felt the greatest amount of freedom,” [he told *The Guardian*](#). “There was an absolute absence of censorship, and freedom of the press and assembly – the atmosphere was almost revolutionary.” On August 21, 1968, Soviet tanks rolled in and the Prague Spring was crushed like a butterfly.

The [Arab Spring of 2011](#) began with street protests in Tunisia that overthrew an authoritarian regime. Other nations followed and, for a fleeting, fragile spring moment, it seemed the Middle East could finally escape its nightmarish legacy and embrace liberal governance. But the nightmare wouldn’t yield. Egypt chose a new boss just like the old boss. Libya and Yemen descended into chaos. Hope died as the troops marched, barrel bombs fell, and people starved. Spring remains a long way off.

The green shoots of spring become the dry tinder of summer. Where many see a time of enlightenment, others perceive an existential threat. Newton's third law of motion states: For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. The laws of physics govern human behavior as well as the movement of objects. Action inspires reaction. Arguments inspire counter-arguments. Trends trigger counter-trends. Attacks provoke counter-attacks.

There is a dangerous battle line being drawn: fascism versus the rest of us. Modern American fascism is fueled by right-wing extremism and white supremacy and its leader is Donald Trump. Too harsh? Trump himself declared the battle line by lumping his political enemies into the catch-all category of “antifa.” The term “antifa” means “anti-fascist” and is not confined to a

specific organization or movement. Professor Stanislav Vysotsky of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, whose book on antifa will be published next month, [told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel](#) that "Every single comment Donald Trump has made about anti-fascism" is misleading or fundamentally incorrect. "First and foremost," he said, "there is no ANTIFA organization."

Vysotsky criticized Trump's threat to declare antifa a "terrorist organization" as a political tactic by Trump and his followers that has nothing to do with anti-fascists. "They are seeking to discredit their political opponents," he said, "and they are unable to describe them on the merits of their beliefs and their claims, so they're trying to associate their political opponents with anti-social political activities."

Attorney General William Barr accused "antifa" of infiltrating Black Lives Matter protests following Floyd's killing. "We have evidence that Antifa and other similar extremist groups have been involved in instigating and participating in the violent activity," Barr told a press conference, [as reported by Fox News](#). Trump and Barr want to provoke violence against "antifa," which includes anybody they disagree with. "Disagree with him and you are the enemy," writes E. J. Montini in *The Arizona Republic*. "And now he has a name for such people: Antifa."

"But what may be even more important is the impact of Fox News and other right-wing media outlets," [wrote Amanda Marcotte in Salon](#), "who have been shamelessly misleading their audiences, hyping imaginary threats and creating the rationalizations that right-wing vigilantes — or, more bluntly, domestic terrorists — need and want in order to justify their assaults and threats against peaceful protesters and other innocent people."

The tactic is working, [according to Nicholas Kristof of the New York Times](#), who notes crowds gathered in several communities to repel antifa-led invasions that never occurred. "Antifa, short for anti-fascists, hasn't killed anyone and appears to have been only a marginal presence in Black Lives Matter protests," writes Kristof. "These antifa panics are where racism and hysteria intersect," he added, "in a nation that has more guns than people. They arise when a lying president takes every opportunity not to heal our national divisions but to stoke them, when people live in a news ecosystem that provides no reality check but inflames prejudices and feeds fears."

A president who orders the military to [forcibly clear a park of peaceful protesters](#) so he could take a stroll for a photo-op will not hesitate to sic his followers on his opponents. This will be a violent, ugly summer because of Trump.

But the counter-attack will not be limited to violence in the streets. There will be voter intimidation and voter suppression while many Americans are denied the right to vote safely by mail in the midst of a pandemic. There will again be attempts by Vladimir Putin and Russia to interfere with and influence the American election.

Spring is over and a violent summer is upon us. The question is whether the fall election will bring a new American Spring or a Fascist Winter.