

“The beginning of the end of the American experiment”

By: Dr. Abdullah Robin

Americans have been locked in their homes fearing a new virus that has killed more than 100,000 Americans this year, but the death of just one man on the 25th of May brought them out onto the streets to protest, with looting and setting of fires raising fears of civil war.

46 year-old George Floyd was killed by police in the city of Minneapolis. He had bought cigarettes using a \$20 bill that the shop keeper suspected was a forgery, but his crime was being black. He was not resisting arrest, but Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, knelt on Floyd's neck for nearly 9 minutes despite the victim groaning that he could not breathe and crying for his mother before falling silent. He was motionless during the last 3 minutes before the police officer finally lifted his knee from the neck of the lifeless black man, even though many people at the scene begged the police officer to take his knee off the man's neck. Three other police officers were watching, but George Floyd lay under Derek Chauvin's deadly neck restraint even while an ambulance team was checking his pulse before being taken to a hospital where he was pronounced dead. Black people in the US have suffered violent racial discrimination and oppression for more than 200 years, but this case has captured the attention of the US in a historic way with protests growing daily.

The US embassy has been targeted in London, Paris, Berlin, Copenhagen and Mexico as the US has become a symbol of oppression throughout the world. Trump has encouraged violence, calling for looters to be shot and for federal US troops to take control despite the fact that each individual state has its own police force and National Guard. Trump declared that he is "your president of law and order" and yet his security broke up a peaceful demonstration outside the White House with tear gas, rubber bullets and sound grenades so that Trump could have a photo opportunity holding a bible outside a church next to his Defense Secretary in military uniform.

Former allies have deserted Trump. John Allen, a retired four-star Marine general responded saying "That is what happens in authoritarian regimes. That is what happens in illiberal regimes. It doesn't happen in the United States, and we shouldn't tolerate it." He went on to say that these actions "may well signal the beginning of the end of the American experiment." Trump's former Defence Secretary, James Mattis, said, "Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people — does not even pretend to try. Instead he tries to divide us... When I joined the military, some 50 years ago, I swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution. Never did I dream that troops taking that same oath would be ordered under any circumstance to violate the Constitutional rights of their fellow citizens — much less to provide a bizarre photo op for the elected commander-in-chief, with military leadership standing alongside". A Republican senator said, "When I saw General Mattis' comments yesterday I felt like perhaps we are getting to a point where we can be more honest with the concerns that we might hold internally and have the courage of our own convictions to speak up". Trump's response to the senator from his own party who will seek re-election in 2022 was typical, "Get any candidate ready, good or bad, I don't care, I'm endorsing. If you have a pulse, I'm with you!" Trump faces re-election in November, but his former White House chief of staff, John Kelly, said, "I think we need to look harder at who we elect," and he contradicted some of Trump's claims about James Mattis.

What is happening in America now is more than a nation rising up against racism. There is a rebellion against Trump's administration. One of Trump's closest allies, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, defended Trump: "From the time President Trump wakes up until he goes to bed there's an effort to destroy his presidency". What makes this moment very dangerous for the US is that Trump has strong popular support from many voters who feel themselves to be as neglected and betrayed as those suffering from police brutality and racism, and he is seen as their champion.

In order to calm tensions, police and justice departments have punished and charged officers involved in the killing of George Floyd and other acts of brutality across the country, and when these actions have failed to satisfy the crowds, the actions against officers have been increased. However, a backlash has started. Fifty-seven police officers in Buffalo, New York, have resigned from the force's emergency response team after the suspension of two officers who were filmed apparently pushed a 75-year-old protester to the ground who was protesting after a curfew was in force. A man arrested for attacking two girls who were supporting the protests and another man wielding a chainsaw and making racist insults are evidence of how strong emotions are on all sides. The US is bitterly divided, and unsure now of itself or its place in the world.

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