

FDR's Four Freedoms Are Under Attack

In his 1941 State of the Union Address, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt opposed the nation's widespread isolationism. The Nazis occupied continental Europe and Britain needed U.S. support if she were to prevail. Roosevelt argued that, in coming to Britain's aid as her "Arsenal of Democracy", America would be supporting four universal freedoms.¹ Those freedoms bear appreciating today as they quickly dissolve under the Donald Trump/Elon Musk crisis of American democracy.

The freedom of speech

Last week, the Department of Defense withdrew the longstanding access that NBC News, Politico, the New York Times and National Public Radio had to office space inside the Pentagon, reducing their ability to provide coverage of fast-breaking national security stories. Access was withdrawn after their critical reporting about incoming Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth.²

CNN anchor Jim Acosta resigned after eighteen years with the network last month, a victim of Trump's antipathy to CNN.³ By targeting news organizations with billion-dollar lawsuits⁴, repeatedly threatening to revoke the licenses of television networks⁵ and by other means attacking the free press, Trump is rapidly tightening his grip on press freedom. In doing so, he follows in the footsteps of autocrats the world over.

The freedom of worship

Trump yesterday signed an executive order aimed at eradicating "anti-Christian bias" in federal agencies. Rachel Laser, president and CEO of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, stated that "rather than protecting religious beliefs, this task force will misuse religious freedom to justify bigotry, discrimination, and the subversion of our civil rights laws."⁶

Another executive order would allow armed government agents to enter houses of worship without prior authorization, making church attendance a roll of the dice for illegals.

The freedom from want

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) runs programs around the world providing emergency medicine, basic education and hunger relief. By shuttering USAID, Trump and Musk have staged "a dangerous retreat that risks decades of progress in fighting inequality, starvation, pandemics and authoritarianism", stated a spokeswoman for Canada's International Development Minister Ahmed Hussen, perhaps without irony, while watching the world's richest man turn his back on aid recipients.

Then on Wednesday, the Wall Street Journal reported that Doge staffers had infiltrated the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and accessed key systems there. This will not end well for America's poor either.

¹ Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library: [FDR and the Four Freedoms Speech](#)

² Rebecca Hamilton, Just Security (Feb. 6, 2025): ["Connecting the Dots"](#)

³ Ariel Zilber, New York Post (Jan. 28, 2025): ["Jim Acosta reveals ..."](#)

⁴ Rebecca Hamilton, Just Security (Feb. 6, 2025): ["Connecting the Dots: Trump"](#)

⁵ Liam Reilly, CNN (Nov. 7, 2024): ["Trump has long threatened the media"](#)

⁶ Swapna Venugopal Ramaswamy, USA Today (Feb.6, 2025): ["Trump signs executive order"](#)

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The freedom from fear

The Trump presidency has given rise to fear for many inside and outside the U.S., with the heartless crackdown on illegal immigration, the outrageous threat of ethnic cleansing in Gaza, the pardoning of 1,500 participants in the violent Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection (“Now everyone knows that they are at risk of having the shit beat out of them if they oppose Donald Trump”⁷).

And it goes on - the dismissal of the federal prosecutors and thousands of FBI agents who worked those Jan. 6 cases, Trump's priming of law enforcement to prosecute his political opponents, Musk's pushing two million federal employees to resign, in violation of the Pendleton Act. His breach of privacy and protocol at Treasury - in three short weeks, this onslaught has defeated America's constitutional order and threatens to overturn her system of government.

Can this crisis - this utterly illegal power grab on steroids - be considered to be a coup d'état? Is America moving towards dictatorship? And when you are already President of the world's most powerful nation, why bother with a coup? Here lies the rub: When that nation is the U.S., presidential power within the constraints of a robust constitution only gets you so far (and Barack Obama will have some stories on that point). To effect radical change - and to assume the dictatorial powers Trump so admires in the world's despots - it is necessary to act well beyond what constitutional law allows. And for a serial felon like Donald Trump, the law is but a trifle.

Of course, it would never do for the public to be paying too close attention, hence the diversions. Having obtained mastery over the Treasury - arguably the world's biggest piggy bank - Musk and his Muskrats have taken control over other departments in quick succession, behind a smoke screen of weekly Trump absurdities: Gaza, crisis at the Canadian border, tariffs, Canada as 51st state; all too juicy to ignore, while the real story - a story which beggars the imagination, the Musk takeover of the American state - continues without substantive resistance.

Trump's illegal attack on America's four freedoms - the guiding principles of U.S. liberal democracy - has been enabled by the indifference of the Republican Congress and the spineless abdication of their sworn duty to uphold the Constitution. Although the courts have to date presented the greatest roadblock to the Trump coup, without massive support from civil society, how long can they hold out?

There are recent signs that America is starting to take notice. In cities across the U.S., hundreds of people are gathering to speak out about Elon Musk.⁸ Upon hearing that Musk's Doge organization wanted access to department records, workers at the Dept. of Labor office in DC staged a protest.⁹ AOC's recent Instagram Live discussion picked up five million viewers. As they are ejected from one office after another, the civil service refuses to give up. Thus far, only about 2% of the federal workforce has taken the Trump buyout.¹⁰

Yet much has already been lost. According to Larry Jacobs, Director of the Center for the Study of Politics and Governance, University of Minnesota: “You'd have to have your eyes fully closed not to be deeply concerned and outraged about the vacuum that Donald Trump is

⁷ Press Reader (Feb.8, 2025): ['In a real sense, US democracy has died'](#)

⁸ CBC (Feb. 5, 2025): ["Backlash grows as Elon Musk slashes U.S. government"](#)

⁹ Michael Sainato, The Guardian (Feb. 5, 2025): ["Elon Musk's Doge staffers face protest"](#)

¹⁰ Robert Reich, Youtube (Feb. 8, 2025): ["Elon's Wrecking Ball"](#)

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operating in now. In a real sense, US democracy has died this month. It doesn't mean it's dead for the long term but at this moment the idea of an accountable representative system, as the framers of the constitution wrote it, is no longer present.”¹¹

Musk now stands at the head of the American oligarchy, having joined Trump with his own office in the White House. But is the White House big enough for those two egos? Or will Musk at some point rid himself of his useful idiot, jettisoning Trump in favour of the ever-so-pliable J.D.Vance?

Hitler took 53 days to dismantle the German state and assume dictatorial powers, and it was done through entirely constitutional means.¹² How many more weeks until Musk/Trump attain absolute power? The American eagle lies in a state of torpor, sedated by celebrity worship and pro sports, with Canadians plaintively honking from the sidelines. Wake up America, before it's too late!

Guy Talevi
February 10, 2024

Appendix: One Day in the Life of A Coup

To illustrate just how quickly the American state is being disassembled, here is a synopsis of one day's events from last Thursday, Feb. 6, courtesy of JustSecurity.org:

- “Trump attempts to fire Ellen Weintraub, chair of the Federal Election Commission. (He couldn't - she is appointed by Congress).
- Attorney General Pam Bondi directs the FBI to disband its Foreign Influence Task Force.
- Separately, the AG also disbanded FBI efforts to seize Russian oligarch's assets.
- USAID is expected to be reduced to about 290 workers from the more than 5,000 foreign service officers and civil servants (and 60,000 foreign contractors) it currently employs.
- The Trump administration's foreign aid freeze has left about 500,000 metric tons of food worth \$340 million in limbo, a former senior USAID official said.”
- A second federal judge issued a preliminary injunction blocking Trump's attempt to end birthright citizenship for some children born in the United States, stating that to be lawful, the move would require a constitutional amendment.
- The White House is working on an executive order to fire thousands of Department of Health and Human Services workers, sources say.
- Trump yesterday signed an executive order imposing sanctions on the International Criminal Court. The ICC today condemned the order, stating it seeks to “harm its independent and impartial judicial work.
- The Justice Department yesterday sued the state of Illinois and the city of Chicago over allegedly interfering with the Trump administration's immigration crackdown through their state and local protections for undocumented immigrants.”¹³

¹¹ Press Reader (Feb.8, 2025): [‘In a real sense, US democracy has died’](#)

¹² Timothy W. Ryback, The Atlantic (Jan. 8, 2025): [“How Hitler Dismantled Democracy in 53 Days”](#)

¹³ Weronika Galka, Just Security (Feb. 7, 2025): [“Early Edition”](#)