

TALKING TURKEY: Let's Look at the New Civil War and How It Is Evolving

By JIM SMITH

You have probably noticed, as I have, the increasing talk about whether the intractable divisions within America are going to lead to a new civil war. However, war isn't limited to armed conflict, and it's time to recognize that we are already in a civil war and to consider how it might evolve over the coming months and years.

As I write this, Russian troops are encircling Ukraine. Cyber attacks have been launched and disinformation is a potent weapon of choice. The parallels with America seem obvious. American democracy is in the not-so-early stages of an "incursion" by anti-democratic forces that is a prelude to a complete takeover. We saw an early skirmish on Jan. 6, 2021, but there will likely be more violence as time progresses. Violence against others shows us what could happen if we resist non-violent attacks — that's how terrorism works.

The war is being waged on several levels. Politically, non-compliant Republicans are threatened with primary challenges by Trump-endorsed candidates. Members of his "base" reinforce the demands for compliance with death

threats against them and their families.

Also on the political level is the "precinct strategy" of Steve Bannon, the former president's close political adviser whom Trump pardoned of federal fraud charges. On his "War Room" podcast the night before the Jan. 6th insurrection, Bannon rallied his millions of listeners, saying, **"We're on the point of attack. All hell will break loose tomorrow."** As reported by ProPublica on Sept. 2, 2021, while the insurrection was happening, he said, **"It's them against us. Who can impose their will on the other side?"**

After that uprising failed to keep Trump in office, Bannon's strategy evolved, producing results we can all see. To quote the ProPublica article,

The solution, Bannon announced, was to seize control of the GOP from the bottom up. Listeners should flood into the lowest rung of the party structure: the precincts. "It's going to be a fight, but this is a fight that must be won, we don't have an option," Bannon said on his show in May. "We're going to take this back village by village ... precinct by precinct."

It's called "asymmetrical warfare," a

term coined by Andrew J.R. Mack in a 1975 article, **"Why Big Nations Lose Small Wars."** Disinformation, supercharged now by social media, was rendered mainstream if not invented by the Soviet KGB, which created a "special disinformation office" in 1923. Disinformation, such as about "critical race theory," is a primary tool of the forces within the Republican Party which want to supplant our liberal democratic heritage with an autocracy rooted in racism and white supremacy.

There are enough Americans with expressed and unexpressed racial animus to provide a boots-on-the-ground army to intimidate and, if necessary, attack opponents in a guerrilla war against the rest of us. The anti-racism movement has only empowered and inflamed those elements of our society.

Democracy worked fine for those forces when they were in the majority, but as America diversifies and they find themselves unable to win free and fair elections, stronger measures are needed, starting with voter suppression.

Of course, ultimately a war requires arms, and the rightwing forces are well armed, as the rest of us are keenly

aware. The majority of weapons, especially assault rifles, are in the hands of the right wing and its militias, making verbal threats a highly effective weapon. Brandishing arms often suffices.

Death threats and threats against their families have been very effective at getting non-compliant school board members, election workers and elected officials to cut and run, surrendering our schools, election boards, city councils, state legislatures and the U.S. Congress to the forces of autocracy.

Effective manipulation of voting laws provides an air of legitimacy to the new autocrats. Thanks to the lifetime appointment of like-minded judges to our courts, especially the Supreme Court, repressive and anti-democratic laws have been upheld by the Court in the past and we could see that again.

It's sad and disheartening to see the disinformation spouted on rightwing media repeated by ordinary citizens. If these forces prevail in 2022 and 2024, I fear that the "American Experiment" will have failed.

My thanks to the readers who support this column through my GoFundMe campaign at www.FundTalkingTurkey.com.