

MADELEINE ALBRIGHT: FASCISM a Warning

The former secretary of state Madeleine Albright recently issued a book titled:

Fascism a Warning

Having in mind the title of the book, I expected a text that would be a serious, scientific contribution to the deeper study of the causes of the origin, development and consequences of the social pathological phenomena called Fascism. However, to my surprise and disappointment, the essence of the book is everything else but that. The text is burdened with political zeal which substantially limits cognitive domains, methodological consistency and scientific equilibrium of author's work, so it largely contains elements of a political pamphlet.

In summary, one can say, book is not intended to study fascism, mentioning Mussolini, Hitler and the other characters that are associated with various forms of totalitarianism are only a collateral damage compared to the main target. When all the veils are removed the target becomes completely clear and it is the president of United States Donald Trump.

At the very beginning the author raises the question (p. 4) ...“why, this far into the twenty-first century, are we once again talking about Fascism? One reason, frankly, is Donald Trump. If we think of Fascism as a wound from the past that had almost healed, putting Trump in the White House was like ripping of the bandage and picking at the scab”.

For her Trump, almost never did she write the president, (p. 5): “systematically degraded political discourse in the United States, sown an astonishing disregard for facts, libeled his predecessors, threatened to ‘lock up’ political rivals, referred to mainstream journalists as ‘the enemy of the American people’, spread falsehoods about the integrity of the U.S. electoral process” ...

Talking about Putin, the author notes (p. 164): ...“the American intelligence community reported that Moscow had used online tools to influence the American electoral process and to help Putin's preferred candidate, Donald Tramp, gain entrée to the Oval Office.

When talking about “North Korean Fascism” the author in that context puts the president (pp. 202-205):“Trump said he would be ‘honored’ to speak directly with Kim Jong-un”... And describing the president (pp.209-210) Ms. Albright is writing that his “eyes light up when strongmen steamroll opposition, brush aside legal constraints, ignore criticism, and do whatever it takes to get their way”. About that context, author wrote that the president Rodrigo Duterte has “gained global notoriety for his reliance on police and civilian vigilantes to kill suspected drug

dealers” and he “has told police officers who are on trial for abusing their authority to go ahead and plead guilty so he can pardon and promote them”. Author said: ...“Donald Trump phoned Duterte to congratulate for doing an “unbelievable job”. She then attacks Egyptian president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who “seized power in a military coup” ...“turned the clock back on the Arab Spring” ...“government is censoring public debate, using lethal force against protesters, harassing journalists, outlawing political opposition, and filling its jails with tens of thousands of dissidents” ... Ms. Albright: “In Donald Trump’s view, el-Sisi is ‘fantastic’”.

The author then (p. 212) wraps up the Ambassador’s Nikki Haley statement, that Trump slaps the right people (and) hugs the right people, “she speaks the truth upside down”. And continues: “Trump’s view of the United States is dark. Among his favorite mantras are that U.S. courts are biased, the FBI is corrupt, the press almost always lies, and elections are rigged. The domestic impact of these condemnations is to demoralize and divide” ...“the lives of investigative reporters, independent jurists, and others who pursue truth are at risk under the best of circumstances. The danger intensifies when the occupant of the White House ridicules the credibility of their professions”. The author then (p. 213) points out: “Trump is” ...“a gift to dictators, and coming from a chief of executive of the United States, cause for shame”.

The former state secretary then claims (p. 216-220): “The architects of the Trump administration’s foreign policy use two labels to describe the structure they have built: ‘Principled Realism’ and ‘Putting America First’” and puts it all in a Nazi-fascist context! “Trump’s view of life as a wilderness of Darwinian dogfights doesn’t correspond to the intricately interdependent world in which we must frequently join forces if we are to make the best of our lot.” And then she makes more than an offensive allusion in relation to the current president by quoting Kissinger who said that Nixon was “a little crazy”, and then she compares: “Trump can seem unhinged” ...“There are those who consider Trump to be an unintelligent man. I make no such accusation. I do, however, confess to concern about his steadiness and the transparent brittleness of his ego.” It is interesting that the author does not even mention that it during Nixon-Kissinger’s time “the unprecedented change” (Henry Kissinger, Diplomacy) in US foreign policy was adopted: in the future foreign policy will be based on an analysis of national interest and America will engage in the interpretation of political, not legal principles (Nixon Papers, 1970, p. 116 and beyond). Is not this the strongest slogan of America at first? And at the time of Clinton-Albright’s power, this precedent was not only used but also abused!

Ms. Albright continues to offend both the President Trump and the US voters as well as the US Constitution (p. 221): “I continue to believe that the United States banked enough international goodwill in the interval between George Washington and Barack Obama to recover from the present embarrassment - but I am not sure how extensive or lasting the harm will be, hence the worries. The potential damage may be of several types. Trump’s election alone cast doubt in international circles on the judgment of the American people and on the reliability of the democratic system to produce defensible outcomes”. Is this, in essence, a call for a coup?

The author allegedly fears (p. 223) of “a return to the international climate that prevailed in the 1920s and ‘30s, when the United States withdrew from the global stage and countries everywhere pursued what they perceived to be their own interests without regard to larger and more enduring goals”. She then quotes Holocaust survivor Primo Levi that every age has its own Fascism and that critical point can be reached “not just through the terror of police intimidation, but by denying and distorting information, by undermining systems of justice, by paralyzing the education system, and by spreading in a myriad subtle ways nostalgia for a world where order reigned”. Ms. Albright continues (p. 223-224): “If he is right (and I think he is) we have to be concerned” ...”the American president’s disrespect for truth, and the widening acceptance of dehumanizing insults, Islamophobia, and anti-Semitism as being within the bounds of normal public debate”. Leaving aside the logical problem of being at the same time Islamophobic and anti-Semitic, she hints again that the American president is a fascist or, at least, on a bold path to become a fascist. It seems to me that Albright is obsessed with Trump, but in any case, the rudeness of her words is in harmony with the lowness of her feelings.

Author then (pp.226-228) writes about the emergence and development of populism in the United States, connecting it to fascism, to immediately points out that “Donald Trump is routinely described as a populist despite his country-club lifestyle, a cabinet stocked with billionaires” ...adding that “military dictatorships would be among the most populist states on earth”. In continuation (pp.232-234) author writes that she posed a question to her graduate students: “Can a Fascist movement establish a significant foothold in the United States?” and her students, she claims, responded that it is possible, and some of them, she says, mention Trump and Republicans, adding that we “have learned from history that Fascists can reach high office via elections”.

At the end of the book (pp. 246-254), so there would be no doubt who is the real target of the attack (Mussolini, Hitler, Kim Il-sung, Putin, Erdogan, Chavey, Orban, Mugabe, Hun Sen, Musaveni, Ortega, Kagame and so on – those names she mentions here, are just collateral damage) she sets the title: “The shadow looming over these pages is, of course, that of Donald Trump.”! She explains that he is the president because: “he convinced enough voters in the right states that he was a teller of blunt truths, a masterful negotiator, and an effective champion of American interests”. After that she “explains” that: “Trump is the first antidemocratic president in modern U.S. history”; “he would audition for dictator, because that is where his instincts lead”. She sees America through the lens red and blue states, where the red states are obviously less valuable to her than the left states! Comments such as “antidemocratic president” and fit to audition for a Dictator are not supported with enough evidence to be expressed in the first place. The author mocks both the head of state and the American people who voted and ultimately elected President Trump.

It is understood that in a democratic state it is not and cannot be forbidden to criticize even state symbols (symbols of the state: flag, coat of arms, anthem and head of state) but it is assumed that this critique would be supported by tested facts. As a former state official and a lecturer at universities one would expect more from Ms. Albright's book. However instead of utilizing her own experience as state official to give readers an insight and combined it with academic rigor in this book she only shows high degree of mockery, superficiality and total disrespect of the electoral will of the American people.

In fact reading her book made me think of Noah Webster's famous thought: "It is always better to be vulgarly right than politely wrong". Although in this case even though Ms. Albright tries to focus on the President's "bluntness" to make a connection with fascism, she is the one that comes across as spiteful towards a large part of the American society that supports the democratically elected President.

It would be much better if her career as a writer ended with her fifth book. On second thought, this sixth book is useful as yet another proof of how much political, ideological and personal hostility is harmful for an objective scientific approach, in general, and especially in the case of studying a multiple complex historical, political, legal, economic, sociological and other social phenomena and processes, what is, next to others, fascism.

You might just have to change the title of the book to "Albright a Warning".

Dr. Oliver Antic, redovni profesor prava
i ambasador R. Srbije u R. Portugaliji

P.S.

Portuguese weekly "Expresso" published (October 13, 2018) a great interview with Madeleine Albright under the title: Fascism grows where people are convinced that everyone lies.

The interview is, of course, associated with her latest book and thus directly directed against the president Trump. I will only mention four question and four answers from that interview.

Journalist: Do the signs we see in countries such as the US, Russia, Turkey, or Hungary really compare with the rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s?

Albright: No two situations are the same. Part of what we see includes echoes of what our ancestors witnessed in the last century. I would draw attention to the epigraph of Primo Levi's book, a Holocaust survivor: "Every age has its own fascism".

Journalist: What should be the role of Donald Trump in this advent of illiberal and undemocratic leaders? Is he the “legitimiser-chief?”

Albright: The US President must be a leader in defending democratic institutions, principles and practices. The current President did not embrace this role, which I am not even sure he understands. This failure has encouraged leaders in other countries who want to increase their powers without respect for democratic values.

Journalist: Technology was crucial to the consolidation of totalitarian regimes. How do you comment on Trump’s use of Twitter and the massive use of social networks to manipulate and influence voters and public opinion?

Albright: The first step of a fascist regime is to try to monopolize the flow of information through propaganda, media control in all its forms, and dictating what can be taught in schools. Fortunately, the abuse and manipulation of social networks has not yet reached that point. I am concerned about what appears to be a deliberate effort to discredit professional journalism and to spread confusion about the very definition of “truth” and “facts”. Fascism grows where people are convinced that everyone lies and that it takes a strong hand to impose order on a chaotic world. That is why independent media are so essential to democracy.

Journalist: Many of the leaders portrayed in the book come to power after their predecessors somehow failed. Could this be true in Donald Trump’s case?

Albright: Polls show that President Obama had very high levels of public approval by time of the 2016 election. It is also true that the Democratic candidate received three million more votes than the Republican. I do not think Obama has failed and I still do not understand why the election had that outcome.

In other words, the former secretary of state wants to persuade the international community that president Trump was elected in an unlawful and illegitimate manner! Or maybe she absolutely does not know anything about election laws and regulations in the United States? Does anyone believe in that?

Dr. Oliver Antic, Professor of Law and
Ambassador of Serbia to Portugal