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photo credit: Shutterstock

Phantom Terror, by Adam Zamoyski (Basic Books, 2015).

Born in America and raised in Britain, Adam Zamoyski is not a tenured university professor devoted to obscure subjects that appeal only to audiences of academic guilds. Nor does he write for a small readership. That's why

his books sell and his prose excites; he can narrate a compelling account while carrying an insightful thesis. His latest book, *Phantom Terror*, bears a subtitle that will cause libertarian ears to perk up: "Political Paranoia and the Creation of the Modern State, 1789-1848."

Challenging the validity of modern states and their various arms and agencies is the daily diet of committed libertarians, but Zamoyski is not, to my knowledge, a libertarian of any stripe. Yet he challenges the modern State and its various arms and agencies, whatever his intentions or beliefs, and he refuses to shut his eyes to the predatory behavior of government. To appreciate the goals of his book, one must first understand how he came to his subject.

The story is simple: While researching, Zamoyski uncovered data suggesting that governments in the decades following the French Revolution deliberately incited panic among their citizens to validate increasingly restrictive policies. The more governments regulated and circumscribed individual freedoms, the more they took on the shape of nation states: geopolitical entities that had their roots in 16th- and 17th- century Europe but had not fully centralized.

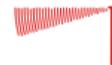
If there's a main character here, it's Napoleon Bonaparte. Zamoyski has written about Napoleon in previous books, including *1812: Napoleon's Fatal March on Moscow* (2005) and *Rites of Peace: The Fall of Napoleon and the Congress of Vienna* (2008). Having escaped from exile in Elba in February 1815 and suffered defeat at the Battle of Waterloo later that year, Napoleon, once the Emperor of the French, had been reduced to the status of a prisoner, stripped of his dignity and rendered militarily ineffective, his health quickly declining.

"Zamoyski does not focus on any one state but moves from city to city, leader to leader, depicting how European governments staged rebellion for their own benefit."

Tsar Alexander of Russia, seeing the great

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Napoleon neutralized, called for a holy covenant with Emperor Francis I of Austria and King Frederick William III of Prussia. For Alexander, who envisioned the State as the realization of a divine idea, the three united rulers reflected the trinitarian Christian God from whom their autocratic, quasi-sacred powers derived. Alexander believed that the unsettling of tradition and order during the French Revolution could be counteracted or cured by the systematic institutionalization of despotic government. First, though, the masses needed to be instructed in the manifest nature of revolutionary threats lurking behind every corner, in every neighborhood, among friends and family, in unexpected places.

And then came the police, a new body of official agents vested with administrative powers and decorated with the symbols and insignias of authority. Until then the term "police," or its rough equivalent in other European languages, designated minor officials with localized duties over small public spaces. European states lacked the administrative machinery of a centralized enforcement network besides the military, whose function was to conquer foreign territory or defend the homeland, not to guard the comfort, health, and morals of communities in disparate towns and villages. The latter task was for parochial institutions, custom, churches, nobility, and other configurations of local leadership.

In the wake of the French Revolution, with its ritualistic brutality, mass hysteria, and spectacular regicide, sovereigns and subjects began to accept and support the power of centralized governments to deploy political agents, including spies and informers. According to Zamoyski, the growing police force—secret agents and all—was less interested in basic hygiene, sanitation, and safety and more interested in subverting the political clout and conspiratorial tendencies of local nobility.

To maximize their power, emperors and government ministers gave color to grand falsehoods about their weakness. Only in their exaggerated vulnerability, catalyzed by true and imagined Jacobins, Freemasons, Illuminati, and other such bugaboos, could they exercise their strength. Seizing upon anxieties about civil unrest, rulers cultivated in their subjects a desire for police protection, supervision, and surveillance. Conspiracy theories worked in their favor. Francis ordered his police to be vigilant about the spread of Enlightenment ideas; he enacted censorship measures by which people disciplined themselves into obedience, leaving the police to serve, often, as mere symbols of control.

Zamoyski does not focus on any one state but moves from city to city, leader to leader, depicting how European governments staged rebellion for their own benefit. Several individuals figure prominently for their different roles during this turbulent time: Edmund Burke; Empress Catharine II of Russia; William Pitt; Klemens von Metternich; King Ferdinand VII of Spain; King Louis Philippe; Arthur Wellesley, the First Duke of Wellington; Charles Maurice de Talleyrand; Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh; Joseph Fouché, and marginal characters both stupid and intelligent, of high and low station.

Eventually repression and tyranny backfired. The State apparatus and its leaders across Europe adopted the very tactics and practices they feared in their own nations. They became the kind of terrorists they had attempted to eradicate. In their quest to bring about their own worst nightmare, they brought about the revolutions (and the revolutions of 1848) they meant to avoid and inspired the movements they intended to eradicate.



Entrapment, espionage, propaganda, tyranny, sedition, secrecy, conspiracy, treachery, reaction, regime—it's all here, and it reveals that the operations of power are counterintuitive and complex, even if they're logical. Hesitant to draw parallels with our present managerial



nation states and their version of authoritarian rule, Zamoyski nevertheless marshals enough evidence and insinuation to make speculation about the current order inevitable.

There's the shadow of Foucault in the background: Zamoyski portrays power as dependent on its lack, exploring how those with authority allow certain freedoms to then suppress them. There's no power that's not power over something. Permitting only such personal autonomy and agency as could be subdued enabled European governments to put their authority on display. States manufacture resistance to exercise—indeed show off—their muscle.

With their sprightliness these chapters win for themselves a certain charm. Zamoyski has not just recounted the sequence of events during a fascinating era but explicated an exciting theory about them and the forces driving them. It's too soon to understand the logic behind the rumors, and the disinformation, we know world powers spread today. Zamoyski provides no direction to this end. He does, however, use history to awaken our imagination to the workings of global power structures, forcing us to ask questions and seek answers about the phantoms of terror that continue to haunt us.

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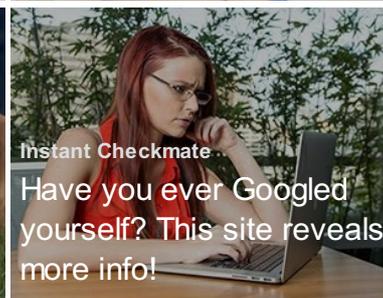
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 **Mnestheus** • 9 hours ago
Those who fail to remember the intellectual history of the Seventies, both 18- and 19- doom their children to relive them.
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 **Medici1** → Mnestheus • 9 hours ago
Just try to engage the younger generation, even pre-Common Core. You'll find a reluctance to engage in substantive discussion, or in critical thinking. That seems to be by design. I yearn for the pre-68 days.
3 ^ [v] • Reply • Share >

 **WhereAreTheVikings** → Medici1 • 3 hours ago
Find a home schooler to engage with. That should prove more rewarding.

^ [v] • Reply • Share >



John Jeremiah Smith → WhereAreTheVikings
• an hour ago

The media power-bloc has begun focusing, in earnest, on demonizing and suppressing home-schooling.

^ [v] • Reply • Share >



Bardon Kaldian → Medici1 • 2 hours ago

or in critical thinking.

Hahhhah, that's a good one. They don't know what the damm thing is....

^ [v] • Reply • Share >



John Jeremiah Smith → Mnestheus • an hour ago

Huh? No way. Smartphones and social media have displaced so much as the smallest sliver of perception and analysis in our nation's Yute. They are quite pathetic, really. Completely manipulated, utterly at the mercy of the media power-bloc.

1 ^ [v] • Reply • Share >



Brother John → John Jeremiah Smith
• 28 minutes ago

Displaced? *Naahh*. They've just filled an existing void that previously had been taken by other things, and that is occupied by thinking and reading in productive people.

^ [v] • Reply • Share >



John Jeremiah Smith → Brother John
• 12 minutes ago

Stop! We're BOTH right! New Dawn dish-washing liquid really IS both a detergent and a hand-lotion!

^ [v] • Reply • Share >



Pearlbuck • 7 hours ago

Timely. The events in Baltimore--echoing those that occurred in Ferguson--raise important questions: Does the power want riots? Is that why the National Guard was held back in Ferguson? Why the police were held back in Baltimore? is that why someone as looney as that New Black Panther idiot and others are allowed to travel around and instigate and organize such mayhem? The American System has zero tolerance for ideological firebrands it doesn't like, as was evidenced by the fates of the Matthew Hales and The Weavers and so on. Are the conspiracy "nuts" actually right on this one? Is this repulsive rioting being encouraged by the power, to gain all the more power?

5 ^ [v] • Reply • Share >



John1943 → Pearlbuck • 7 hours ago

The police of the European monarchies were minor league compared to the huge apparatus we live under. They had a right to be scared. The radicals murdered a lot of government officials including Czars, Kings and even the wife of Franz Josef. WW1 was brought on the murder of his heir. The left has used the police state with the most brutality and oppression by far. We on the right have been mostly choir boys.

3 ^ [v] • Reply • Share >



Fafnrd → John1943 • 4 hours ago

Pregnant wife.

So the Serb murderer killed 3 persons.

2 ^ [v] • Reply • Share >



John Jeremiah Smith → John1943 • an hour ago



... commenters · an hour ago

Kinda depends on the time-frame. Attila sent his troops into a walled-city, locked the gates and killed 100,000 by the sword. Did that on three separate occasions, in fact.

Attila was not known for his left-leaning tendencies.

The reaction of rebellion to the symbols of monarchy and oppression is not particularly surprising, now is it?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Villax → John Jeremiah Smith · an hour ago

I agree that time frames (among other issues) to be considered. But I wonder how many walled anything at Attila's time with 100 000+ habitants did exist. What I know, Attila have encircled Rome, then left without much bloodshed but with some ransom. Could not master the fortifications of Constantinople - retreated.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



John Jeremiah Smith → Villax · an hour ago

Your basically sensible cost-benefit analysis. Attila was one of the first great entrepreneurs.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Villax → John Jeremiah Smith · 24 minutes ago

Thanks for guiding me to Trigger Warning. Site looks gorgeous.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



John Jeremiah Smith → Villax · 9 minutes ago

Eh, it's okay. Typical of "We can save the world through sarcastic social commentary and fashion sense" websites operated by 40-ish wymyn.

Not enough contrast between font and background. Narrow font, hard to read -- would be next-to-impossible on an iPhone in office lighting.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Fafhrd → Pearlback · 3 hours ago

These are not really questions.

It's quite obvious that some riots are allowed and even welcomed while others will render you a bullet between the eyes.

What is incomprehensible is the incredible cowardice and slave mentality of the White inhabitants of "The Land of The Free". So scared they'll lose their job, their car, their social standing. But losing the ground under their feet doesn't much bother them.

I've heard that somewhere in Asia people catch and eat monkeys. They've since long devised a cheap and perfect trap for catching these monkeys. Because of the warm climate it is unwanted that then monkey dies or bleeds in the trap. Spoils the meat.

By studying the behaviour and character of these monkeys the locals have come up with the following trap.

[see more](#)

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Bardon Kaldian → Fafhrd · 2 hours ago

To "awake" the complacent you have to have at least two things:

1. media power
2. and, even more effective- the socio-economic collapse.

And, the "monkey fist" is the invention of Bushmen in South Africa.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Sick Dr Joe → Bardon Kaldian · 2 hours ago

But you might could manage it with media power alone.

Well and good to add "and even more effective-", but the fact is that for a solid century now that media power has been in the hands of a tiny alien elite. And I'd bet money they'd welcome "socio-economic collapse"... before they'd stand for *any* diminution in their "media power".

If we *had* #1, we might yet *avert* #2, and the horrors that are sure to follow.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



John Jeremiah Smith → Bardon Kaldian · 2 hours ago

In the USA, just like in any other country, socio-economic collapse means civil war.

Let's not knock ourselves back to the swamps this time around.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Fat Freddy's Cat → Pearlback · 10 minutes ago

One needn't be a conspiracy nut to think there may be something to this. The folks in power may not cook up these incidents but they're not above exploiting them, i.e. the Rahm Rule "never let a crisis go to waste".

There have undoubtedly been times when the authorities did create the crisis. I mean, come on, it's not as if they're so scrupulous that they wouldn't stoop to such means.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Drain52 · 5 hours ago

Speaking of literature, what happened to Ann Sterzinger?

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Bardon Kaldian → Drain52 · 2 hours ago

I suppose she's writing, somewhere

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



John Jeremiah Smith → Drain52 · 2 hours ago

She went the SSDW route (Same Shit, Different Website)

<http://fineillstartagoddamnblo...>

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



logprof · 5 hours ago

". . . and who are you, after all?"

"I am part of the power which forever wills evil and forever works good"

--Johann Goethe, Faust

William Scott, Trust
3 ^ [v] • Reply • Share >



John Jeremiah Smith • 28 minutes ago

Sherman's dashing Yankee boys will never make the coast!
So the saucy rebels said and 'twas a handsome boast
Had they not forgot, alas! to reckon with the Host
While we were marching through Georgia.

So we made a thoroughfare for freedom and her train,
Sixty miles of latitude, three hundred to the main;
Treason fled before us, for resistance was in vain
While we were marching through Georgia.

^ [v] • Reply • Share >

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