

## On Disrupting State Capture

Mel Conway, Ph.D.

### SUMMARY AND ABSTRACT

Without change to its constitutional structure, the way the U.S. Government *actually functions* is being forcibly and rapidly transformed in the direction of an authoritarian unitary executive...a dictatorship. This essay presents a strategy for disrupting that transformation. Some believe that the causal agent behind the transformation is the Republican party. In my view, the Republican party is a victim of a *larger process*, and that process is addressed here.

The goal behind this strategy is rehabilitation of a functioning Article I Congress soon, before Articles I and III become moot. Because Project 2025 is being implemented to rush the creation of irreversible damage, expecting correction in the 2026 midterm elections might well be a serious strategic error.

The Republican Party has workable majorities in both houses of Congress. Because all Congressional Republicans are acting in unison obeying the stated wishes of the President, the power of Congress to balance the President has disappeared. The resultant imbalance is enabling the destruction of the Government, by plainly unconstitutional or illegal behavior, by what is in effect a unitary Executive. Many Executive Orders and acts of DOGE are being challenged in Court, but the delays built into legal processes are leaving irreversible damage behind.

In spite of what is said publicly, there is growing evidence that blind adherence to the demands of Project 2025 is violating the consciences of many Republicans; however, they do not follow their better

judgement because they are receiving credible threats varying from primarying to violence to themselves or family members.

We understand the model being used to enforce Congressional compliance; it is the Mafia Code of Silence: “You rat, you die”. And we understand the antidote to this Code: use an outside source that is protected from retribution to reveal the secrets. This general understanding has led to norms such as whistleblower protection laws, witness protection programs, and inspectors-general. The President’s behavior shows that he has the same understanding: he has been firing inspectors-general, he has freed for action over 1500 potentially violent loyalists, and he has reorganized the office of the Attorney General, where prosecutorial decisions are made, as a wholly owned subsidiary of the Office of the President.

Therefore, in order to re-establish a functioning Congress, we must create a protected outside source to reveal information that will free up the members of Congress: detailed revelation of the secret Project 2025 enforcement mechanism, including the identities of donors and private militias, and the details of their threats.

The proposed solution is a new public service that will make this information readily available to everyone. The medium of this service will be everybody’s smartphone, in a new and limited role as everybody’s free and trusted national newspaper. Creating such a service will be a formidable task requiring high levels of organizational ability, many challenging policy decisions, and the cooperation of many disciplines (some not accustomed to working together), *and we have only months to create a first useful product.*

**TABLE OF CONTENTS:** Think Networks and Processes 3, Emergence 4, Memes 7, Application to politics 9, Threats and fear 12, The *Crime Syndicate* pattern 13, The strategy 15, Endnotes 16

## THINK NETWORKS AND PROCESSES

This strategy is informed by theory partially described in another essay:

**“Needed: Systems Thinking in Public Affairs”<sup>1</sup>.**

The principal distinction behind the theory is stated on page 2 of that essay. It’s about the way we must think about human organizations:

**THINK NETWORKS FIRST, ACTORS SECOND.**

Thinking of politics in terms of *networks and processes* is not a familiar skill, and it takes some practice. This essay is fashioned to model that skill. I have been teaching it to myself for a while, and I find that it leads to a way of seeing the dynamics of politics that’s different, and more productive, from what one sees and hears conventionally.

The reason for the networks-first approach is that it supports thinking about intervention.

**Effective interventions arise from  
altering interactions and processes within networks.**

The interactions occur on the *connections between* the elements of the network, and you cannot even see these interactions unless you focus on the network.

I’ll begin this exploration with an analogy from the history of medicine. Two centuries ago the field of medicine produced the germ theory of disease. Before that, practitioners of medicine were attributing disease to causal agents such as *The Vapours* and *Demonic Possession*, and they were using interventions such as bleeding and exorcism. There was an awareness of physical pathogens but not of the natures of such pathogens or of such pathogens’ interactions with the patient’s body, and how those interactions manifested as disease.

The availability of microscopes changed that.

What the microscope did was force the process of thinking about disease to operate in *two* descriptive places concurrently, by

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Version: 2025-04-07a, Page 3 of 17

reasoning simultaneously about *two distinct categories of phenomena*: phenomena in the descriptive domain of the microscopic pathogen (the bacterium, say—I’ll call that the “*inner domain*”), and phenomena in the descriptive domain of the macroscopic patient (the fever, say—I’ll call that the “*outer domain*”). The manifestation we commonly call “disease” shows up as

*phenomena* in the outer domain that are  
consequences of aggregate activity in the inner domain.

The challenge in medicine then has become finding, and intervening in, *inner-domain* processes.

## EMERGENCE

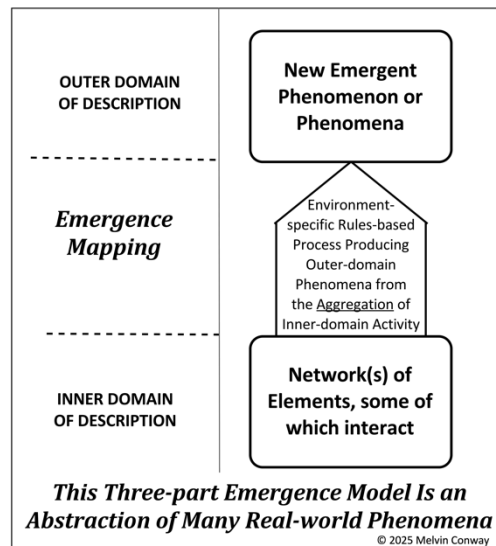
So we’re going to think about the capture of governmental processes as analogous to a disease on the Body Politic. But only briefly, because we’ll quickly move to a more general pattern.

What you’ll see is that this analogy is not a literary device; it’s an opening into a way of thinking about many systems: the *Emergence Model*.

First, let’s summarize the analogy between germ theory and our current model of politics in this table.

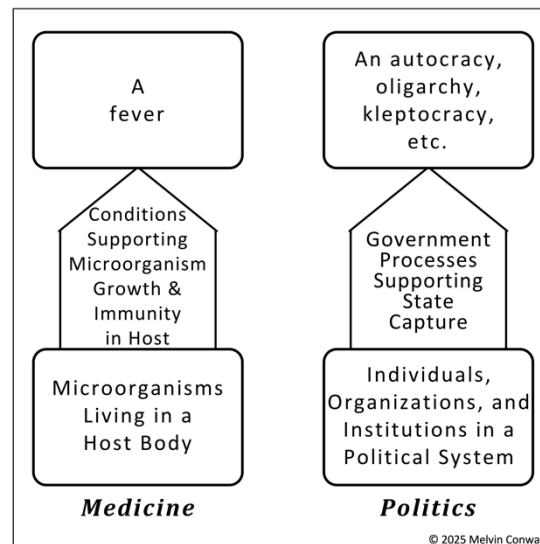
	Germ theory	Politics model
Theory of inner domain (“micro”) phenomena	Microbiology	“Crime syndicate” network <sup>2</sup>
Theory of outer domain (“macro”) phenomena	Medicine	Politics, Sociology
Technology for viewing inner-domain activity	Microscope	Investigative journalism
Outer-domain manifestation of disease	Fever	State capture <sup>3</sup>
Intervention strategy	Antibiotics, Antivirals, etc.	Read on

Both this model of politics and germ theory are instances of a more general model called *emergence*. This graphic illustrates the general emergence model we'll be using here.



There is no accepted model of emergence useful for social systems. While there might be a commonly understood definition of the word, it is useless for building a theory because it is merely descriptive<sup>4</sup>. A model of emergence, in order to be generative, rather than just descriptive, needs to offer an abstraction that gives you instances you can connect to the real world. The graphic above gives you the abstraction; you will see the instances below.

Here are the two concrete instances of emergence we've been discussing, using the same three-part model.

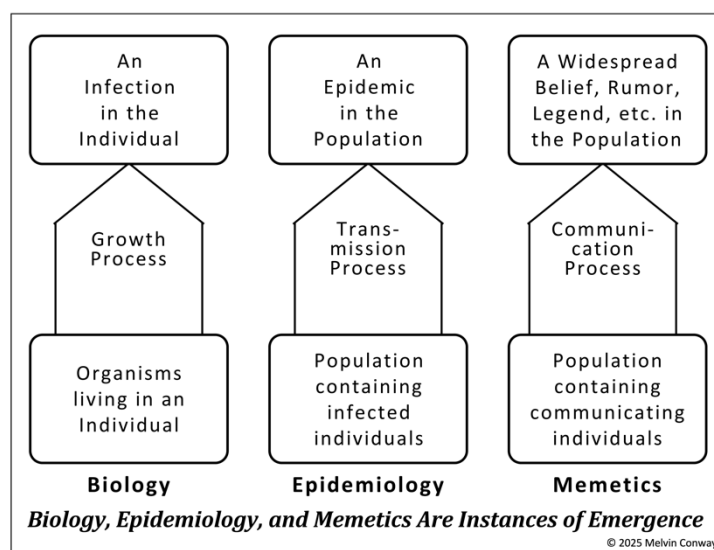


Instances of emergence are not special; they're ubiquitous. I've been writing about this ubiquity since 2020; here is "Freedom is an Emergent"<sup>5</sup>. You will find more social applications in a 2022 essay<sup>6</sup>.

## MEMES

Mememes are transmissible carriers of ideas<sup>a</sup>. In writing about disinformation and the spread of memes I have departed from Dawkins's original view of memes as analogous to genes as agents of *replication*<sup>7</sup>. In the memetics you will see here, memes are analogous to infectious pathogens as agents of *transmission*. Epidemiology is a more productive jumping-off point than genetics toward a theory of propaganda and disinformation, as in the following graphic.<sup>b</sup>

Note that this graphic demonstrates the power of the universal emergence model for uniting seemingly disparate phenomena.



<sup>a</sup> More usefully: When a meme is embedded in an individual, it modifies the behavior of that individual in a way that is consistent with the way that meme modifies the behavior of all other individuals embedding that meme. Thus, a meme can be defined as an equivalence class of stimulus-response patterns.

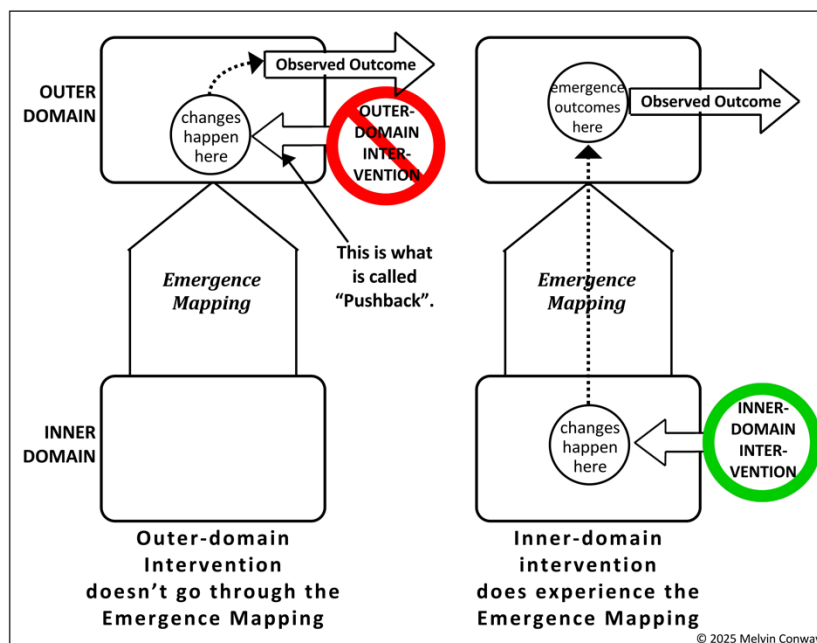
<sup>b</sup> Building an object model of a meme that doesn't require positing an object separate from individuals requires radical thinking; I made an early, promising but incomplete, attempt in 2020. See 33/56ff of [https://melconway.com/CBH/Historical\\_Overview.pdf](https://melconway.com/CBH/Historical_Overview.pdf), and [https://melconway.com/CBH/Attachment\\_Model.pdf](https://melconway.com/CBH/Attachment_Model.pdf).

Why are we wandering into this abstract Emergence territory? Because the Emergence abstraction gives us a *key distinction* that will be the basis of an intervention strategy: Outer-domain intervention vs. Inner-domain intervention. In medicine:

**Outer-domain intervention: modifying the symptoms.**

**Inner-domain intervention: modifying the underlying disease process.**

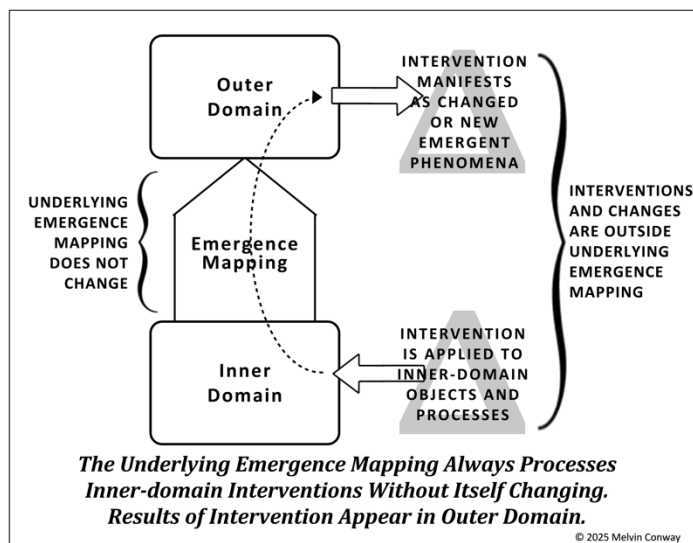
Putting a feverish patient on ice might indeed extend her life, but it will not alter the underlying process producing the fever. In this essay we focus on restoring the underlying Constitutional processes of the American Republic. This graphic portrays the general distinction.



This inner-outer distinction in discussions of political intervention seems not to have reached public commentary. Everything I see proposed consists of outer-domain interventions, frequently called "pushback".



We will focus on inner-domain interventions here. This is how we go around many of the change-resisting negative feedback loops we often find in the outer domain. We'll use this graphic to portray the abstraction of the process of an inner-domain intervention.



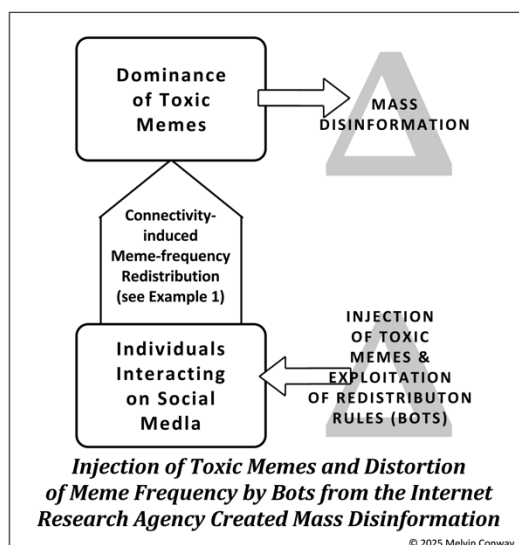
## APPLICATION TO POLITICS

We need to consider the risks associated with inner-domain intervention in politics, whose purpose is to produce a mass effect with a feasibly small input, in spite of all the change-resisting negative feedback loops built into the outer domain. As the Sorcerer's Apprentice experienced<sup>8</sup>, we understand very little about how the thing we're messing with works, so we don't have much ability to control it, and things can go very wrong. We'll have to be careful about that.

To the common mind, the representative inner-domain intervention in politics is something drastically illegal like an assassination. This is not what we'll be considering here; we're going to consider novel uses of legitimate and legal processes.

Even so, our intent is to employ emergence to produce mass effects, and we can't always predict how such effects are going to develop.

This topic is not merely academic. An important example of effective use of inner-domain intervention amplified by social media is the work of the Russian Internet Research Agency in the 2016 Presidential election<sup>9</sup>. (Example 1 mentioned in this graphic is in the “Systems Thinking” essay<sup>10</sup>.)



Why do we even bother with such a risky strategy? A lot of current commentary (on the date of writing in March 2025) is comparing what the current American administration is doing in the first few weeks of the new 2025 Presidential term to what the Nazis did in Germany in 1933. According to an article by Timothy Ryback in The Atlantic<sup>11</sup>, it took the Nazis 53 days to dismantle democracy in Germany using entirely constitutional processes. The openly admitted strategy behind MAGA strategists is “shock and awe”; they expect to have a limited interval of time to make *irreversible* changes before the inevitable pushback processes, including many, many lawsuits, begin to take hold<sup>12</sup>.

We should note, however, that mass inner-domain interventions employing emergent effects, some conscious, some not, are already occurring. These include effects on financial markets (an expected effect of policy inconsistencies producing defensive responses), constituent behaviors in Congressional town halls, public demonstrations throughout the country, and reduced sales of Tesla automobiles. (This last change is apparently also occurring in Europe.) *These are emergent phenomena* and bear watching as opportunities to learn about the inner dynamics of emergence, currently a great but invisible mystery.

David Brooks, in a recent talk at the Alliance for Responsible Citizenship<sup>13</sup>, asserts that self-initiating restoration is built into the American system, that there are several instances of this in America's history, and that we are already seeing its beginning. That's an observation at the outer domain of description. Whether it's actually true or not, the purpose of the strategy described below is to assist such a restoration using inner-domain intervention.

## THREATS AND FEAR

The strategy to be described below is intended primarily to

*fracture the lockstep cohesion of both Republican Congressional conferences.*

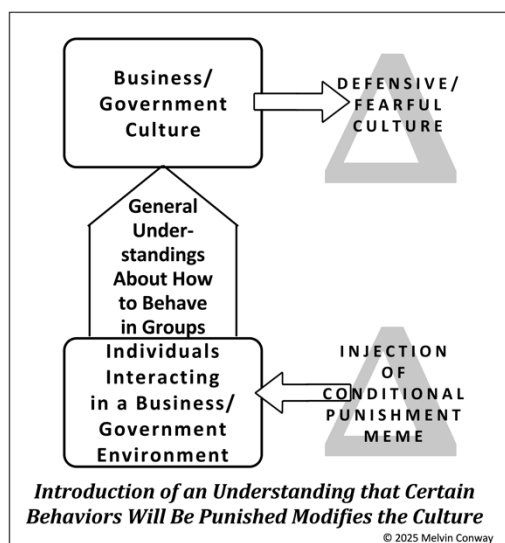
Because Congressional majorities are so thin, particularly in the House, even small successes could have secondary and tertiary consequences that would propagate throughout the society.

This stated goal of the strategy, on its face, seems impossible, given the Republican party's near-perfect cohesion so far during the current term. The extent of that cohesion alone leads me to suspect that there are strong hidden negative feedback loops that make the whole network resistant to change. My suspicion is supported by these two assertions.

1. I view as merely performative the fact that two Senators (who have been used before to demonstrate diversity) were allowed to vote against the confirmation of the Secretary of Defense. That another Senator (who had multiple personal reasons and had expressed strong "doubts" about confirmation) eventually conformed, because her vote was required, supports this skeptical view<sup>14</sup>.
2. Multiple anecdotes are showing up in the news that serious threats have been part of the reasons for the near-perfect Republican cohesion<sup>15 16</sup>.

The hypothesis underlying the strategy to be presented here is that *threats*, both nonviolent and violent, are key components of the Republican cohesion strategy. Threats are appearing, not only in the Congress but in the Judiciary<sup>17</sup>. This has been the case long before the current Congressional term<sup>18 19</sup>.

There is also now emerging evidence that a general sense of fear, represented in this graphic, is pervading certain parts of the Government and Business. This is an inner-domain intervention that changes the character of the work environment<sup>20 21 22</sup>. There are reports that the newly reconstituted Department of Justice has a changed culture<sup>23 24</sup>.



## THE CRIME SYNDICATE PATTERN

The use of fear and threats as an organization tactic is older than our species. I've written about an abstraction I call a "Crime Syndicate" pattern, a simple example of which is a neighborhood protection racket. We see it everywhere and at all scales.<sup>25</sup> I've been exploring this model for years. Here is a pdf of something I tweeted December 2020.<sup>26</sup> Note that *Donors* are full participants of the model. Today, especially since the mass pardoning of the January 6 ex-convicts, I also include *Private Militias* in the Enforcement role.

In brief, the Crime Syndicate model is simply a scaling-up of a Mafia-style protection racket. It is a set of people who are (not necessarily fully) connected by two transaction subnetworks:

1. The *Mission* transaction subnetwork carries out the public function of the organization. The mission of a political party, for example, might be stated as keeping its members in power.
2. The *Enforcement* transaction subnetwork maintains the coherence of the organization by keeping people in line. As the U.S. is descending from its nominal constitutional model, violence and threats in Enforcement are assuming more important roles<sup>27</sup>  
<sup>28 29 30 31 32 33</sup>. The question of the possible enforcement roles of the pardoned January 6 ex-convicts looms<sup>34</sup>.

A general understanding of a need for secrecy is often built into the culture of enforcement. Mafia-like cultures have a word, *omertà*<sup>35</sup>, for the widely accepted code of silence, but the idea that one must not “rat” on one’s peers is much more widely understood and enforced.

The fact that silence is a point of vulnerability whose violation must be punished gives rise to an inner-domain intervention for attacking this vulnerability: someone outside the reach of the enforcement subnetwork must be found to reveal the secret. This is why we have laws protecting whistleblowers, witness protection programs, and inspectors-general. This is why Donald Trump has been firing IGs and has created a Department of Justice, where decisions whether or not to prosecute are made, that is a wholly-owned subsidiary of the President. Even the seemingly silly threat to “investigate” the members of the Congressional January 6 investigation committee can be seen as *omertà* signaling<sup>36</sup>.

## THE STRATEGY

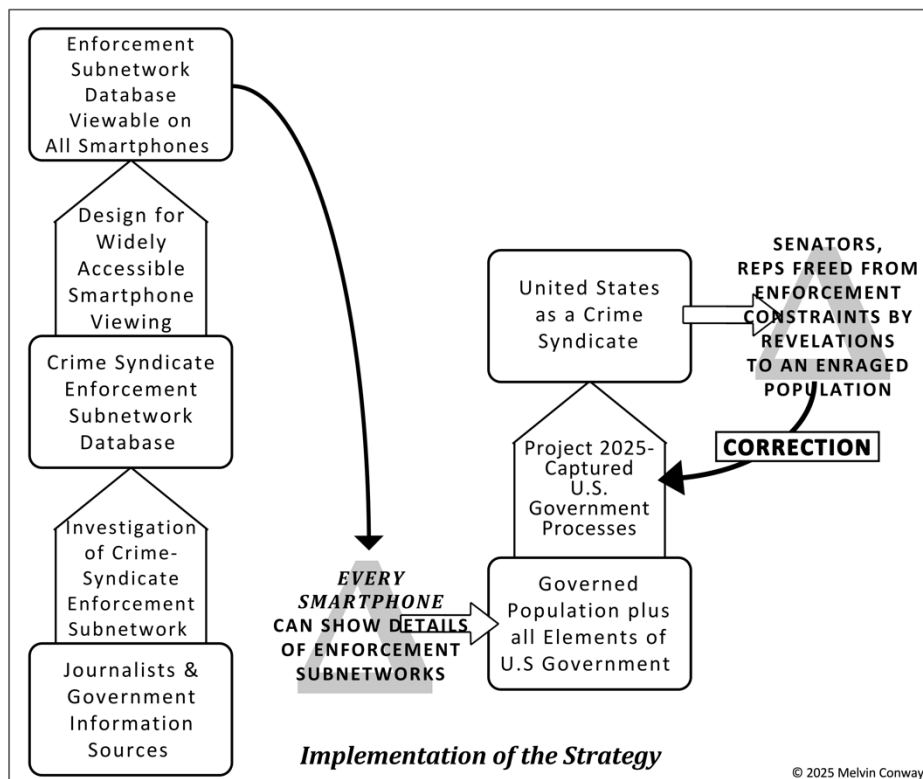
The task is to create a *public service* that will lie beyond the reach of the Project 2025 enforcement transaction subnetwork and that will fully reveal the details of this subnetwork to the entire voting public. This is meant to allow all Congress people to do their jobs without fear.

1. The public service will make details of the Project 2025 enforcement transaction subnetwork (including, to the full extent possible, names of donors and private militias) *quickly, fully and publicly visible to the entire voting population*. Some of this information already lies with journalists; for what is not known there is now a structure that defines the necessary investigation.
2. An assumption is that an enlarged minority of voters will be even more enraged by seeing that *the Government already is an oligarchy*, and these voters will send stronger messages to their Representatives and Senators.
3. The longer we wait the more we will lose. Some of the destruction being caused by DOGE and the Administration will be irreversible. This strategy can be effective well before the 2026 midterm elections, once the enforcement secret has been widely revealed. *In fact, it must be.*
4. The medium for the revelation of the secret will be the ubiquitous smartphone, in a *new, unhackably read-only role as everybody's free national newspaper*. (Doing this presents many new problems, including enlisting, unifying—and protecting—journalists, and building a new, secure, widely accessible website—more than one difficult problem in itself. It will probably require multiple iterations, but time is of the essence to get *something* out.)

If this is successful you will see a few Congressional Republicans acting again as thoughtful individuals. This strategy does not require many.

Only a few can signal the destruction of the hegemony, breaking the grip on legislation and confirmations.

This diagram shows the overall structure of the proposed intervention. Implementation will not be simple; actually, I'm not convinced it can, or should, be done within existing organizations.



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## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> "Systems Thinking" essay: <https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/UbiquitousConnectivity.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Multiple examples here: <https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/RestoringForce.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> There is detailed documentation of a case of state capture in South Africa here: <https://pari.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Betrayal-of-the-Promise-25052017.pdf> The detailed structure is described on (nominal) p. 56 (physical) p. 60

<sup>4</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emergence>

<sup>5</sup> [https://melconway.com/CBH/Freedom\\_Emergent.pdf](https://melconway.com/CBH/Freedom_Emergent.pdf)



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- <sup>6</sup> Examples at [https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/social\\_emergence.pdf](https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/social_emergence.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Memetics>
- <sup>8</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snB8u\\_G3jVl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=snB8u_G3jVl)
- <sup>9</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet\\_Research\\_Agency](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet_Research_Agency)
- <sup>10</sup> <https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/UbiquitousConnectivity.pdf> See the Lessons, pp. 23-28.
- <sup>11</sup> [https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/01/hitler-germany-constitution-authoritarianism/681233/?gift=BqMDibzmc7X-4PZq0kMMEiDUyw8DsJaL\\_Kk1\\_fyK9oM&utm\\_source=copy-link&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=share](https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/01/hitler-germany-constitution-authoritarianism/681233/?gift=BqMDibzmc7X-4PZq0kMMEiDUyw8DsJaL_Kk1_fyK9oM&utm_source=copy-link&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share)
- <sup>12</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/steve-bannon-flood-zone-strategy-explained-trump-policy-blitz-2027482>
- <sup>13</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSa52TR9tCA>
- <sup>14</sup> <https://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/news/politics/2025/01/16/joni-ernst-pete-hegseth-nomination-underscores-donald-trump-post-election-maga-influence/77726782007/>
- <sup>15</sup> <https://bsky.app/profile/mehdirhasan.bsky.social/post/3ljulhfheuc2d>
- <sup>16</sup> <https://www.democraticunderground.com/100220009119> (See WNYC transcript)
- <sup>17</sup> <https://www.rawstory.com/that-s-the-america-we-want-fury-as-violent-threats-hit-trump-judge/>
- <sup>18</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/15/us/virus-michigan-whitmer-threats.html>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/21/us/politics/jan-6-trump-threats.html>
- <sup>20</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/06/us/politics/trump-democracy.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.2E4.d0eo.AkIVEAtu3xX8&smid=url-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/06/us/politics/trump-democracy.html?unlocked_article_code=1.2E4.d0eo.AkIVEAtu3xX8&smid=url-share)
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/trump-congress-political-violence>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://www.democracydocket.com/opinion/we-cant-give-in-to-fear/>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/doj-official-says-was-fired-opposing-restoration-mel-gibsons-gun-right-rcna195287>
- <sup>24</sup> [https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/28/us/politics/justice-department-trump.html?unlocked\\_article\\_code=1.7E4.TzXv.ZdwyN3pAJv92&smid=url-share](https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/28/us/politics/justice-department-trump.html?unlocked_article_code=1.7E4.TzXv.ZdwyN3pAJv92&smid=url-share)
- <sup>25</sup> <https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/RestoringForce.pdf>
- <sup>26</sup> [https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/Crime\\_Government.pdf](https://melconway.com/Home/pdf/Crime_Government.pdf)
- <sup>27</sup> <https://x.com/PeterHotez/status/1798898170329436379> (X post re anti-science, anti-vax)
- <sup>28</sup> <https://bsky.app/profile/mehdirhasan.bsky.social/post/3ljulhfheuc2d> (Bluesky post)
- <sup>29</sup> <https://bsky.app/profile/gastropoda.bsky.social/post/3lhevmovalk2c> (Bluesky post by Mehdi Hasan)
- <sup>30</sup> <https://www.democracydocket.com/opinion/we-cant-give-in-to-fear/> (Marc Elias editorial)
- <sup>31</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/14/us/swatting-incidents-trend-explained/index.html> (Swatting incidents)
- <sup>32</sup> <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/story/trump-congress-political-violence> (Fears in Congress)
- <sup>33</sup> <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/law/fear-of-trump-has-elite-law-firms-in-retreat-6f251dec?st=n6q2Lf> (Intimidation of law firms.)
- <sup>34</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/president-trumps-pardons-create-his-own-private-army-opinion-2019079> (Newsweek editorial on pardoned January 6 convicts)
- <sup>35</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Omert%C3%A0>
- <sup>36</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/jan-6-panel-members-defiant-message-donald-trump-threat-2046394>