



THE BLOG

W: "My Government"

By Marty Kaplan

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Here's how W is defending the Dubai decision: "The more people learn about the transaction that has been scrutinized and approved by my government, the more they'll be comforted..."

For a moment, set aside the "trust-me" part of this, and focus instead on the "my government" bit.

If he'd said "my administration," I wouldn't have blinked. "My cabinet" would also have raised no hackles. If he really wanted to use the word "government," then how about these pronouns as antecedents for "people": "their government" or "our government."

But no, he said "my government." I don't think that's just a garden variety Bushism, a trivial malapropism. I think it goes right to his understanding of who he is, and who we are. It's not a Freudian slip; it's an Orwellian siren, an anti-democratic red alert.

The founding documents of our nation talk about *the* government, *our* government, *a* government, *any* government. If *my* is used, it's said on behalf of the citizens, not their rulers.

But W really believes that it's *his* government. He doesn't see himself as a steward, a trustee, a caretaker, someone who temporarily gets to steer the ship of state because of the momentary consent of the governed and an enduring set of rules. No, he believes it's *his* ship, *his* state, *his* rules — his and his ideological fellow-travelers.

The heads of some countries with parliamentary systems, like India, sometimes say "my government"; when they do, it means 'my Cabinet,' "my temporary ruling colition," "my majority" — which could fall in an instant, if there were a no-confidence vote.

But in the US, we don't have governments that get made and dissolved year-round; we have Administrations, that get formed every four years.

In the American context, unless it's an ordinary citizen like you or me speaking, let's recognize the expression "my government" as what it really is: a deeply troubling oxymoron, the inappropriate yoking together of a democratic institution and — well, a moron.