

Follow the Money: The Secret Heart of the Secret State. The Deeper Implications of the Snowden Revelations

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[Empire Burlesque](#)

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No one, anywhere, has been writing about the deeper and wider implications of the Snowden revelations than Arthur Silber. (I hope you're not surprised by this.) In a series of powerful, insightful essays, Silber has, among other things, laid bare the dangers of the oddly circumscribed 'gatekeeper' approach of the journalistic guardians (at, ironically, the Guardian) of Snowden's secrets, particularly their slow drip-feed of carefully self-censored tidbits from the famous Powerpoint presentation that Snowden secreted from the bowels of the United Stasi of the American intelligent apparat.

Eschewing the Wikileaks approach, the guardians at the Guardian have not let us judge the material for ourselves, opting instead to adopt, unwittingly, the same approach of the apparat: "we are the keepers of knowledge, we will decide what you need to know."

As Silber notes, this doesn't vitiate the worth of the revelations, but it does dilute their impact, leaving gaps that the apparat — and its truly repulsive apologists all through the 'liberal media' — can exploit to keep muddying the waters. He explores these ramifications, and others, in ["In Praise of Mess, Chaos and Panic"](#) and ["Fed Up With All the Bullshit."](#)

In his latest piece, ["Intelligence, Corporatism and the Dance of Death,"](#) he cuts to the corroded heart of the matter, the deep, dark not-so-secret secret that our secret-keepers are trying to obscure behind their blizzards of bullshit: it's all about the Benjamins.

After noting the gargantuan outsourcing of "intelligence" to private contractors like Booz Allen — the very firm that employed Snowden — Silber gives a quick precis of the essence of state-corporate capitalism (*see the originals for links*):

The biggest open secret all these creepy jerks are hiding is the secret of corporatism (or what Gabriel Kolko calls "political capitalism"):

There is nothing in the world that can't be turned into a huge moneymaker for the State and its favored friends in "private" business, at the same time it is used to amass still greater power. This is true in multiple forms for the fraud that is the "intelligence" industry.

The pattern is the same in every industry, from farming, to manufacturing, to every aspect of transportation, to the health insurance scam, to anything else you can name. In one common version, already vested interests go to the State demanding regulation and protection from "destabilizing" forces which, they claim, threaten the nation's well-

being (by which, they mean competitors who threaten their profits). The State enthusiastically complies, the cooperative lawmakers enjoying rewards of many kinds and varieties. Then they'll have to enforce all those nifty regulations and controls. The State will do some of it but, heck, it's complicated and time-consuming, ya know? Besides, some of the State's good friends in "private" business can make a killing doing some of the enforcing. Give it to them! Etc. and so on.

Silber then goes on:

... But that's chump change. The real money is elsewhere — in, for instance, foreign policy itself. You probably thought foreign policy was about dealing with threats to "national security," spreading democracy, ensuring peace, and whatever other lying slogans they throw around like a moldy, decaying, putrid corpse. The State's foreign policy efforts are unquestionably devoted to maintaining the U.S.'s advantages — but the advantages they are most concerned about are access to markets and, that's right, making huge amounts of money. Despite the unending propaganda to the contrary, they aren't terribly concerned with dire threats to our national well-being, for the simple reason that there aren't any: "No nation would dare mount a serious attack on the U.S. precisely because they know how powerful the U.S. is — because it is not secret."

How does the public-"private" intelligence industry make foreign policy? The NYT story offers an instructive example in its opening paragraphs:

When the United Arab Emirates wanted to create its own version of the National Security Agency, it turned to Booz Allen Hamilton to replicate the world's largest and most powerful spy agency in the sands of Abu Dhabi.

It was a natural choice: The chief architect of Booz Allen's cyberstrategy is Mike McConnell, who once led the N.S.A. and pushed the United States into a new era of big data espionage. It was Mr. McConnell who won the blessing of the American intelligence agencies to bolster the Persian Gulf sheikdom, which helps track the Iranians.

"They are teaching everything," one Arab official familiar with the effort said. "Data mining, Web surveillance, all sorts of digital intelligence collection."

See how perfect this is? All the special people are making tons of money — and, when the day arrives that the U.S. wants to ramp up its confrontational stance with Iran, well, there's the UAE helping to "track the Iranians" with all the tools that the U.S. has given them and taught them to use. And how easy would it be to get the UAE to provide the U.S. with just the right kind of new and disturbing "intelligence" that would get lots of people screaming about the "grave Iranian threat"? You know the answer to that: easy peasy. A wink and a nod — and off the U.S. goes, with bombing runs or whatever it decides to do. But whatever it does will be determined in greatest part not by a genuine threat to U.S. national security (there is no evidence whatsoever to suggest that Iran's leaders are all suicidal), but by what will make the most money for the State and its good friends.

Silber then underscores once more the highly instructive principle laid out by Robert Higgs:

I remind you once again of what I call The Higgs Principle. As I have emphasized, you can apply this principle to every significant policy in every area, including every aspect

of foreign policy. Here is Robert Higgs explaining it:

As a general rule for understanding public policies, I insist that there are no persistent “failed” policies. Policies that do not achieve their desired outcomes for the actual powers-that-be are quickly changed. If you want to know why the U.S. policies have been what they have been for the past sixty years, you need only comply with that invaluable rule of inquiry in politics: follow the money.

When you do so, I believe you will find U.S. policies in the Middle East to have been wildly successful, so successful that the gains they have produced for the movers and shakers in the petrochemical, financial, and weapons industries (which is approximately to say, for those who have the greatest influence in determining U.S. foreign policies) must surely be counted in the hundreds of billions of dollars.

So U.S. soldiers get killed, so Palestinians get insulted, robbed, and confined to a set of squalid concentration areas, so the “peace process” never gets far from square one, etc., etc. – none of this makes the policies failures; these things are all surface froth, costs not borne by the policy makers themselves but by the cannon-fodder masses, the bovine taxpayers at large, and foreigners who count for nothing.

...It’s all about wealth and power. Here and there, in episodes notable only for their rarity, “the intelligence world” might actually provide a small piece of information actually related to “national security.” Again, I turn to Gabriel Kolko:

It is all too rare that states overcome illusions, and the United States is no more an exception than Germany, Italy, England, or France before it. The function of intelligence anywhere is far less to encourage rational behavior—although sometimes that occurs—than to justify a nation’s illusions, and it is the false expectations that conventional wisdom encourages that make wars more likely, a pattern that has only increased since the early twentieth century. By and large, US, Soviet, and British strategic intelligence since 1945 has been inaccurate and often misleading, and although it accumulated pieces of information that were useful, the leaders of these nations failed to grasp the inherent dangers of their overall policies. When accurate, such intelligence has been ignored most of the time if there were overriding preconceptions or bureaucratic reasons for doing so.

Silber concludes:

...The intelligence-security industry isn’t about protecting the United States or you, except for extraordinarily rare, virtually accidental occurrences. It’s about wealth and power. Yet every politician and every government functionary speaks reverently of the sacred mission and crucial importance of “intelligence” in the manner of a syphilitic preacher who clutches a tatty, moth-eaten doll of the Madonna, which he digitally manipulates by sticking his fingers in its orifices. Most people would find his behavior shockingly obscene, if they noticed it. But they don’t notice it, so mesmerized are they by the preacher with his phonily awestruck words about the holy of holies and the ungraspably noble purpose of his mission. Even as the suppurating sores on the preacher’s face ooze blood and pus, his audience can only gasp, “We must pay attention to what he says! He wants only the best for us! He’s trying to save us!”

What the preacher says — what every politician and national security official says on this

subject — is a goddamned lie. The ruling class has figured out yet another way to make a killing, both figuratively and literally. They want wealth and power, and always more wealth and power. That's what "intelligence" and "national security" is about, and nothing else at all. When you hear Keith Alexander, or James Clapper, or Barack Obama talk about "intelligence" and surveillance, how your lives depend on them, and why you must trust them to protect you if you wish to continue existing at all, think of the preacher. Think of his open sores, of the blood and pus slowly dribbling down his face.

All of them are murdering crooks running a racket. They are intent on amassing wealth and power, and they've stumbled on a sure-fire way to win the acquiescence, and often the approval, of most people. They are driven by the worst of motives, including their maddened knowledge that there will always remain a few people and events that they will be unable to control absolutely. For the rest of us, their noxious games are a sickening display of power at its worst. For us, on a faster or slower schedule, in ways that are more or less extreme, their lies and machinations are only a Dance of Death.

There is much more in Silber's essays; go read them all now, if you haven't done already.

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