

It is “Deep State” Time Again

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Whenever there are obvious conflicts within the ruling class, the concept of a Deep State is brought out to explain why our government seems to be coming apart at the seams. When the tired rhetoric of our two party system can't bring us to a satisfying catharsis, there is always the deus ex machina of grand conspiracies and hidden rulers.

The actual nature of our oppression, however, has been in plain sight for decades, although assiduously avoided by much of our media. The criminality of the CIA and the FBI is a case in point. Both agencies have long been well beyond Congressional oversight. The dirty tricks, political harassment, and illegal spying carried out by the FBI, as well as the foreign assassinations, political coups, and massive surveillance of the CIA have only been thoroughly investigated once, and that was during the Church Committee hearings of 1975. The hearings exposed the lawlessness of FBI and CIA, but made little difference in either agencies' long term accountability, despite the creation of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. 

Thirty two years later, Senator Jay Rockefeller, then Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, was asked what progress his organization had made in finding out about the secret operations of the nation's intelligence agencies. In exasperation, he told a young freelance reporter,

“Don't you understand the way intelligence works? Do you think that because I'm chairman of the Intelligence Committee that I just say 'I want it, give it to me'? They control it. All of it. All of it. All the time.”

Dirty tricks, however, don't really add up to the power many attribute to the Deep State. Killing foreign leaders like Patrice Lumumba, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, or filming Martin Luther King's hotel rooms, blackmailing him, and pressuring him to commit suicide are criminal acts. But they don't really destroy the primacy of our basic democracy. Martin Luther King's murder, however, is different. So are the murders of the other progressive leaders of the 1960's who challenged the entrenched power of the national security state: Fred Hampton, Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy, and of course, President John Kennedy himself.



JFK was determined to bring the CIA under his control, right up to his assassination in Dallas. Whether or not he actually said he wanted “to splinter the C.I.A. in a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds,” as reported in The New York Times in 1966, his frustration and anger at the CIA are well documented. So too is his choice to use the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE) to negotiate with Nikita Khrushchev during the perilous nuclear standoff. Were these threats to CIA dominance enough to bring in its assassins?

The FBI takedown of Richard Nixon is similarly destructive to our constitutional form of government. “Deep Throat,” the hidden source of information about Nixon’s ties to the Watergate burglars, was none other than the Associate Director of the FBI, Mark Felt. Both Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, the reporters from the Washington Post who exposed Nixon’s impeachable offenses, have admitted they were fed the critical information by Felt. Nixon had appointed an ally, L. Patrick Gray, as acting director of the FBI in an attempt to bring it under his control. Did Felt act alone, or was Nixon’s impeachment orchestrated by the agency?

If the CIA and the FBI were complicit in the overthrow of presidents and the murder of popular American leaders, then all bets are off. There is no democracy, only Deep State directed terror. The fact that the American people are never given enough information to distinguish dirty tricks from Deep State assassinations and the removal of elected presidents, is a growing cancer in our body politic.

The existence of great decision making power apart from any democratic process is worrisome enough. But the lack of any accountability to the people and sheer criminality of what little that has been uncovered leads inevitably to the illegitimacy of the state in most citizens’ eyes.

The immense and unchecked power of the major corporations and their billionaire owners are another source of doubt about our present form of government. Is there a federal agency not under some sort of corporate control? Hundreds of millions in dark money have been flooding our electoral process. Congress and the president are only vaguely accountable to the voters because their very existence in office is dependent on this largely untraceable flow of money.

We have seen Trump’s plans to drastically cut the Environmental Protection Agency and expose American citizens to even more pollution and the accelerated destruction of our natural habitat. Under Obama, the criminality was a bit more subtle. A five year EPA report about the effect of fracking on the nation’s drinking water was simply altered at the very end to support the continuation of this form of natural gas extraction. Who ordered the

scientific conclusion to be altered? Non other than head EPA officials after meeting with key advisers to President Obama. The dominance by big business interests is welcomed by both establishment parties.

Corporate millions buy armies of lobbyists, think tank analysts, media commentators, and willing scientists. Hidden campaigns attempt to neutralize opposition though dirty tricks and “astroturf” corporate supporters. Then there is the government to industry employment pipeline, the best way for politicians and their crony colleagues to cash in after they sell out.

The most pernicious of these lobbies are the ones for big oil, big agriculture, big pharmaceutical, big banks, and of course the defense industry. Military spending is close to half the national budget, and Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and General Dynamics all have their “advisors” who sit in the Pentagon planning new wars for the American people to pay for. With 800 foreign military bases, and drone assassinations being conducted in at least seven countries, the US is consistently seen as the “greatest threat to world peace” in international surveys. As this country moves its armies and missiles ever closer to Russia and China, the chances of a nuclear Armageddon increase along with the profits for US weapons makers. The continuation of life on earth is never part of the profit making equation.

The major corporations have been so successful in dominating governmental decision making that foreign nations have taken notice. Two extremist and racist theocracies, Saudi Arabia and Israel, have established the most influence in Washington. The Saudis gave the Clinton Foundation 10 million for access to new jet planes, which they have used to wage a genocidal war against a Shia uprising in neighboring Yemen. And Israel has conducted a brutal 50 year occupation of Palestinian land and the apartheid oppression of 5 million people, all with US military aid and US protection at the United Nations.

During Israel’s recent high tech slaughter in Gaza, over 500 Palestinian children were murdered. Many were incinerated by lasers and white phosphorus bombs while cowering in UN schools. But our Congress, paid sycophants to the Lobby, voted that Israel had a right to “defend itself” by destroying Gaza’s only power plant as well as 18,000 of its homes. Israel lost just one house.

The only interest group in the US that has the power to make public criticism illegal is the Israel Lobby. Express condemnation of Israel’s apartheid state and we might lose our job or be added to a government blacklist. Advocating for the rights of 5 million oppressed Palestinians may soon become completely illegal. Would Exxon Mobile, Lockheed Martin or Monsanto ever have the clout in state capitals or in Washington to make public criticism of them against the law? The Israel Lobby, with its deep financial, high tech, and religious ties to the US is the best example of how our constitutional form of government has been infiltrated and subverted. Even the First Amendment is for sale.



Do we, in fact, need to keep talking about the Deep State when the anti democratic forces in our country are quite plain to see? There are certainly the eccentric and secretive billionaires like the Koch brothers, Robert Mercer, and Haim Saban who shovel hundreds of millions into our supposedly democratic system. Yes, we have a multilayered kleptocracy with its share of secret channels and dirty dealing.

But to think that it is completely hidden makes us overlook the obvious. We have been living with the corruption of our democratic ideals for decades. And now the transition from neoliberalism to a form of ultra corporatism is being done right in front of our eyes. Let's not waste our time speculating about the Deep State. We see the machinery of surveillance and repression first hand, and although we can't be aware of all its secret machinations, we know enough to join the resistance while we still can.

Fred Nagel is a US veteran and political activist whose articles have appeared in CounterPunch, Global Exchange, Mondoweiss, Popular Resistance, War Crimes Times (Veterans For Peace publication) and Z Magazine. He also hosts a show on Vassar College Radio, WVKR (classwars.org).

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