

Oliver Stone: 'US has become an Orwellian state'

By [RT](#)

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Americans are living in an Orwellian state argue Academy Award-winning director Oliver Stone and historian Peter Kuznick, as they sit down with RT to discuss US foreign policy and the Obama administration's disregard for the rule of law.

Both argue that Obama is a wolf in sheep's clothing and that people have forgiven him a lot because of the "nightmare of the Bush presidency that preceded him."

"He has taken all the Bush changes he basically put them into the establishment, he has codified them," Stone told RT. "It is an Orwellian state. It might not be oppressive on the surface, but there is no place to hide. Some part of you is going to end up in the database somewhere."

[\(116.9Mb\) embed video](#)

According to Kuznick, American citizens live in a fish tank where their government intercepts more than 1.7 billion messages a day. "That is email, telephone calls, other forms of communication."

RT's Abby Martin in the program Breaking the Set discusses the Showtime film series and book titled The Untold History of the United States co-authored by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick.

"Obama was a great hope for change"

RT: It took both of you almost five years to produce this series. And in it you have a chapter called Obama: Management of a Wounded Empire. You give a harsh critique of the Obama administration. What in your eyes has been the most troubling aspect of his presidency, Oliver?

Oliver Stone: I think under the disguise of sheep's clothing he has been a wolf. That because of the nightmare of the Bush presidency that preceded him, people forgave him a lot. He was a great hope for change. The color of his skin, the upbringing, the internationalism, the globalism, seemed all evident. And he is an intelligent man. He has taken all the Bush changes he basically put them into the establishment, he has codified them. That is what is sad. So we are going into the second administration that is living outside the law and does not respect the law and foundations of our system and he is a constitutional lawyer, you know. Without the law, it is the law of the jungle. Nuremburg existed for a reason and there was a reason to have trials, there is a reason for due process - 'habeas corpus' as they call

it in the United States.

RT: *Do you agree Peter?*

Peter Kuznick: I agree, if you look at his domestic policy, he did not break with the Bush administration's policies. If you look at his transparency – he claimed to be the transparency president when he was running for office. There has not been transparency. We have been actually classifying more documents under Obama than we did under Bush. All previous presidents between 1970 and 2008 indicted three people total under Espionage Act. Obama has already indicted six people under the Espionage Act. The surveillance has not stopped, the incarceration without bringing people to trial has not stopped. So those policies have continued.

Then there are war policies, militarization policies. We are maintaining that. We are fighting wars now in Yemen, Afghanistan, we are keeping troops in Afghanistan. We have not cut back the things that we all found so odious about the Bush administration and Obama added some of his own. The drones policy – Obama had more drone attack in the first eight months than Bush had his entire presidency. And these have very dubious international legality.

OS: Peter was hopeful that the in the second term there will be some more flexibility, we hope so. But, there is a system in place, which is enormous – the Pentagon system.

RT: *It almost seems that they took the odious CIA policies and just branded them, so it is now acceptable – the assassinations, the extrajudicial executioner without the due process. It is fascinating.*

“We are all ultimately watching ourselves”

PK: We complained during Bush years that Bush was actually conducting surveillance without judiciary review. Obama is killing people, targeted assassinations without judiciary review. That to us is obviously much more serious.

RT: *You also cover Pearl Harbor, which of course led to the internment of Japanese American citizens. I do not think a lot of people acknowledge that once again underreported aspect of really what that meant. When you look at the surveillance grid in America today it almost seems like it is an open-air internment camp, where they do not need to intern people anymore because we have this grid set up in place. What do you guys think about that?*

PK: The US government now intercepts more than 1.7 billion messages a day from American citizens. That is email, telephone calls, other forms of communication. Can you imagine: 1.7 billion? We've got this apparatus set up now with hundreds of thousands of people, over a million of people with top security clearances in this kind of nightmarish state, this 1984 kind of state.

OS: One million top security clearances. That is a pretty heavy number. In other words, we are living in a fish pond and I think the sad part is that the younger people accept that. They are used to the invasion. And that is true, how can we follow the lives of everybody? But the truth is that we are all ultimately watching ourselves. It is an Orwellian state. It might not be oppressive on the surface, but there is no place to hide. Some part of you is going to end up in the database somewhere.



Academy Award-winning director Oliver Stone (right) and historian Peter Kuznick

“US fears things, we fear the rest of the world”

PK: And it can be oppressive on the surface. One of the things we feared after 9/11 was that if there was a second serious attack like 9/11 then the constitution would be gone. The crackdown would be so outrageous at that point. And there is still this obsessive fear. The US fears things, we fear the rest of the world. We spend as much money on our military security intelligence as the rest of the world combined. Do we have enemies that we feel so threatened by? Do we really need this anymore? Is this what our priorities should be? No we think not, we want to turn that around.

RT: *The evisceration of the rule of law, especially the National Defense Authorization Act, which eradicates due process – our basic fundamental freedom in this country. I wanted to bring up another interesting point that really struck me in the film series, which are the kamikaze pilots. They were brave, that was the bravest act that you could do and then I can't help but think of suicide bombers today and Bill Maher, he goes out and loses his show for saying these people are brave. And you have people like Ron Paul get up there and talk about blowback as a reality and he is ridiculed. How did we get here, where the discourse is just so tongued down when we can't even acknowledge the truths such as that?*

OS: Primitive of course. There has been a blind worship of the military and patriotism. I strongly believe in the strong military, but to defend our country, not to invade other countries and to conquer the world. I think there is a huge difference that has been forgotten: morality. Once you take the laws away, as Einstein once said famously, the country does not obey its laws, the laws would be disrespected. So it seems that the fundamental morality has been lost on us somewhere on the way recently and now it is what is effective. Can we kill Bin Laden without having to bring him to trial, can we just get it done? And that 'get it down' mentality justifies the ends and that is where countries go wrong, and people go wrong. All of our lives are moral equations. Does the end justify the means? No, it never did.

PK: And the other side of what you are asking is about the constraints upon political discourse in this country. Why are people so uninformed? That is what we are to deal with in the series. If people don't understand their history, then they don't have any vision of the future and what is possible. If they think what exists now – the tyranny of now – is all that is possible, then they can't dream about the future. They can't imagine the future that is different from the present. That is what I am saying – people have to understand the past because if you study the past then you can envision a future that is very different.

We came really close on many occasions to going into very different direction in the future. We came very close in 1944-1945 to avoiding atomic bombing and potentially not having the kind of Cold War that we had. We came very close in 1953 upon Stalin's death to ending the Cold War. We came close in 1963 when Kennedy was assassinated to ending the war in Vietnam, to ending the Cold War, to heading into a very different direction. Then there were the Carter years, again a possibility of a different direction. And at the end of the Cold War in 1989 Gorbachev was reaching out to Bush. Did Bush take that olive branch that Gorbachev was giving him? No, very much different. What did we do instead? We applaud

the Soviets for not invading when countries were liberating themselves from the Soviet Union and then we immediately go and invade Panama and then we invade Iraq.

So we are saying that “it is great that you are showing restraint, but we are not going to because we are the hegemon.” As Madeline Albright, Secretary of State under [Bill] Clinton, says “if the US uses force it’s because we are the United States of America; we are the indispensable nation. We see further and stand taller than other nations.” That is the attitude that Oliver and I are challenging. This sense of American exceptionalism that the US is a city on the hill, God’s gift to humanity, if we do it, it is right. And that is not acceptable.

“We want the country to begin thinking about the big questions again”

OS: It is very funny because the book has been out a few weeks, series have been playing for the fifth week now. We go to TV shows, we sit in these beautiful sets and they are always rushing and rushing. They got news in Gaza, they got Obama. And they ask us what are you talking about? History? What does it have to do with today? What is your point? We sit there very patiently and it is very bizarre to me that they say the past is prologue, that is all happened before and if we are smart you will see it more calmly and won’t overreact. We also argue that this kind of media is driven by dollars, the greed. You have a show and it is really not a news show, it is about rating and how you can get that – with a lot of speed, a lot of zoom and a lot of fancy sets and people watch. Goal is to keep it moving, don’t think, just keep it moving.

PK: A show like this, we can actually discuss the issues at a little more depth, a little more critically.

RT: *If both of you are to make a film about this generation right now, what is one facet that you think is the most underreported or misrepresented?*

OS: I don’t know about the younger generation, I have three children. I think it is an eternal story in some degree. People no matter what have a similar morality and consciousness, patterns re-emerge again and again. The young men and young women want to make their way into the world. And it is not that far off from what we went through. So I believe in cyclical history and I think my children are going through what I and my father and mother went through. I always look for those patterns first beyond the superficiality.

PK: I find that my students care very passionately about what is going on in the world. They are all doing lots of volunteer work. But what I find in this generation, like Oliver’s and my generation, is that they treat the symptoms. They are not asking the questions about the root cause of all of these problems. They care, they try to change things, but it is more superficial.

What we are challenging them to do is look at the patterns. Look at what has happened from the 1890s all the way through to today. Look at the consistency of the wars, interventions, the military expenditures, the paranoia, they fear of outsiders, the oppression. And get it to the root, what is making the system as a whole sick in a certain ways and how can we root out those deeper causes.

Now that we understand that, we can begin to change that. The Occupy movement did some of that there have been times in the 1930s, 1970-80s, 1960s when people were

challenging on that scale. We want the country to begin thinking about these big questions again. What is our past, how did we get here, what are the possibilities for the future, what have we done wrong and what can we get right?

RT: *Do you think these superficialities in the conventional wisdom that we hear are perpetuated to keep us in a perpetual state of war?*

PK: I don't know if it is quite so deliberate, but that seems to be the effect - dumbing down the population to the point where they cannot think critically and then you can pull anything over their eyes. They have a five-minute attention span and a five-minute memory of what happened in the past. We are saying learn your history, study it and think about what the alternatives are, think in utopian ways how different the world could be, how better it could be if we start to organize it rationally in the interest of people, not in the interest of profit, not in the interest of Wall Street, not in the interest of military, in the interest of our common humanity, the six billion of us who occupy this planet.

OS: The model of the series of The World at War, which was made by the BBC in the 1970s about WWII. Ours are 10 feature films, cut with care, an hour each, pure narration, music, and sometimes clips of films that make our point or don't make our point. Either way we try to keep it flowing like a young person could enjoy it like a movie, I am glad you did.

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