

The US Deep State and the Democrats Are the Problem, Not the Solution

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The latest policy recommendations by the influential Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), one of the most well-respected and listened-to experts in Russia – to say nothing of the entire former Soviet space – is causing quite a stir by waxing nostalgically about the Obama years and even suggesting that Moscow should embrace the American “deep state”.

Mr. Kortunov’s Case For Russia’s “Deep State”-Democrat Partnership

Mr. [Andrey Kortunov](#) is one of the most brilliant minds in Russia and earned his place as the Director General of the [Russian International Affairs Council](#) (RIAC), and his words accordingly carry much weight for the fact that they set the tone for countless other analysts in the country and even an untold number of policymakers who look to him for guidance.

That’s why it caused quite a stir when he published his latest recommendation earlier this week at the famous [Valdai Club](#) titled “[Russian Approaches to the United States: Algorithm Change Is Overdue](#)”, in which he waxed nostalgically about the Obama years and even suggested that Moscow should embrace the American “deep state”.

So as not to put words in his mouth, the relevant passages are republished in their entirety below:

“First, it is better to avoid demonizing the Deep State, which is perceived by many in Moscow as the center of world evil and the stronghold of the pathological haters of Russia. Of course, most of the State Department or the CIA officials, the Congress staff, experts from the main think tanks are not Vladimir Putin’s fans. But these people, at least, have considerable experience of interaction with Moscow and can hardly be considered stubborn paranoids, exalted conspiracy theorists or genetic Russophobes. Deep State consists of rationally thinking professionals, who are always easier to deal with than romantic amateurs are. With all its shortcomings, it is the Deep State that limits Donald Trump’s most exotic and potentially most dangerous foreign policy oddities.

Second, it’s time to change the attitude toward the Democratic Party leadership. For some reason (probably because of inertia) the Barack Obama administration is constantly remembered in Russia in the worst possible way, with the two latest presidents constantly juxtaposed. How is Obama bad, and Trump is good? The stubborn facts show otherwise. For example, Obama pursued a consistent policy of rapprochement with Iran, and Trump returned to the most severe pressure on Tehran. Obama followed the international consensus on the status of Jerusalem, and Trump destroyed this consensus.

Obama did not resort to direct military action against Bashar Assad, and Trump did not hesitate to give an order to launch missiles against the Syrian Al-Shayrat airbase. Well, who after all created more problems for Russia — Democrats or Republicans?”

Mr. Kortunov did indeed talk about other aspects of US-Russian relations, including the need for a bottom-up approach to improving his country’s soft power in America, but none of those proposals are controversial, at least not when compared to what he wrote about above.

A diversity of respectful views in any discourse is symptomatic of a healthy democracy, and Russian society is no different in this respect, which is why the dialogue on this topic would be greatly enriched by presenting some counterpoints to Mr. Kortunov’s article.

Deciphering The “Deep State”

The first is that the US’ military, intelligence, and diplomatic bureaucracies (“deep state”) are experienced and rational like Mr. Kortunov describes them as, but that they nevertheless bear primary responsibility for the deterioration in US-Russian relations under both the Obama and Trump Presidencies because the bulk of these professional bureaucrats always retain their jobs between leadership transitions in the country.

The President is supposed to determine the broad trajectory of their work in consultation with his closest advisors, some of whom are handpicked by him and approved by Congress to lead the relevant institutions of the “deep state” while others are more informal, but the rank-and-file members of the “deep state” are still largely more responsible for the execution of policy in practice than anyone else.

Unprecedentedly, many of them oppose President Trump’s stated desire to improve relations with Russia and have worked to unconstitutionally offset his plans, and the pressure that they’ve put on him to this end explains why he’s undertaken decisively anti-Russian policies during his first year in office despite his campaign pledge to do the opposite.

Seeing as how most of these “deep state” individuals naturally remained in the same positions that they had during the Obama Administration and would have probably still retained their jobs under Hillary’s Presidency, it’s inaccurate to attribute the deterioration of Russian-American ties to President Trump personally while overlooking the actions of the “deep state” that he’s still trying to reform to the best of his ability.

The “deep state” is rational – too rational, it can be argued – because it embraces a [Neo-Realist paradigm of International Relations](#) that sometimes correlates with Trump’s own views on certain topics but other times contradicts them like in the case of Russia, and the internal power struggle between Trump and the “deep state” is what’s really to blame for the worsening of bilateral relations, not the “amateur” President’s “romanticism” like Mr. Kortunov insists.

For these reasons, it can be argued that Mr. Kortunov’s belief that the “deep state” “can hardly be considered stubborn paranoids, exalted conspiracy theorists or genetic Russophobes” isn’t exactly accurate, since it’s indeed full of “stubborn paranoids” under the dual influence of the neoconservatives’ Neo-Realism and the Obama-Clinton worldview of

“militant liberalism”.

That said, the “conspiracy theories” that he references are just a “deep state” [infowar distraction](#) to deceive the voting masses while the assertion that such a thing as a “genetic Russophobe” exists [wrongly implies](#) that an individual’s political views are irreversibly predetermined by their DNA.

To flip around Mr. Kortunov’s last comment on the matter, it’s more realistic to assert that “with all his shortcomings, it is Donald Trump that limits the Deep State’s most exotic and potentially most dangerous foreign policy oddities.”

Debunking The Dreams Of Democrat Rule

Relatedly, Mr. Kortunov’s views on the “deep state” clearly influence his attitude towards the Democrats and specifically the Obama Administration, which he thinks is unfairly “remembered in Russia in the worst possible way” because “the stubborn facts show otherwise” and apparently disprove the prevailing notion that “Obama (is) bad, and Trump is good.”

Mr. Kortunov thinks that Obama had pure intentions in signing the nuclear agreement with Iran, though it can [cynically](#) be argued that his “deep state” was in fact trying to co-opt the Islamic Republic’s “moderate/reformist” ruling elite in a bid to tip the scales to their favor in the country’s own “deep state” competition for influence with the “conservative/principalist” military-security faction, the failure of which would [explain](#) why [Trump was tasked](#) with “returning to the most severe pressure on Tehran.”

The enduring presence of most of the “deep state’s” personnel between presidential administrations doesn’t preclude the US from pivoting between policies but actually allows such moves to be more smoothly executed, as can be seen from the example of Nixon’s rapprochement with China in spite of Johnson’s antagonism towards it; Bush Sr. “betraying” Iraq even though Reagan aligned with it; Obama signing the nuclear deal against the former Bush Jr. Administration’s wishes; and Trump dismantling his predecessor’s plans.

Although the President might set the tone for the overall direction that each respective policy should go in and this sometimes reverses what the previous administration did, it’s ultimately the “deep state” that puts these ideas into practice and is able to maintain a degree of strategic continuity that advances [America’s national interests](#) regardless, though the case of Trump’s vision for US-Russia relations also shows that this same “deep state” can also conspire to obstruct the President’s will.

Image on the right is Director of the Russian International Affairs Council Andrey Kortunov.



Another “stubborn fact” at variance with Mr. Kortunov’s nostalgia for Democrat rule is the practical significance of Obama “following the international consensus on the status of Jerusalem” and Trump “destroying” it since it inaccurately hints that the former was somehow ‘pro-Palestinian’ and that the latter’s announcement tangibly changed something on the ground, neither of which are true because Obama was actually [very pro-Israel](#) and Trump’s decision [only stands to affect](#) foreign aid recipients who voted against the US and the UN.

Looking beyond Obama's highly publicized personal rivalry with Netanyahu and his populist rhetoric on the Palestinian issue, nothing that he did during his two terms had any influence on Israel's occupation of East Jerusalem and unilateral claim to the entirety of the city being its capital; likewise, Trump's words didn't change any of this reality either and only resulted in word games being played at the UN and the [Organization of Islamic Cooperation](#), neither of which did anything other than attempt to comfort the Palestinians.

As for Mr. Kortunov's juxtaposition of Obama's refusal to "resort to direct military action against Bashar Assad" with Trump "not hesitating to give an order to launch missiles against the Syrian Al- Shayrat airbase", he's totally overlooking the 44th President's responsibility for the theater-wide "Arab Spring" [Color Revolutions](#) and the resultant [Hybrid War](#) of Terror on Syria which dealt incomparably more damage to Syria and its democratically elected President's standing than Trump's handful of one-off missiles.

In addition, Trump only ordered the attack because he was under [intense "deep state" pressure to do so](#) after having been caught in a Catch-22 trap where he was forced to "put his money where his mouth is" and respond to the false-flag chemical weapons attack that violated his "red line", but truthfully speaking, what Mr. Kortunov might really resent is that it only took a few million dollars' worth of missiles to [call President Putin's bluff](#) in hinting at a military response to the exact same scenario in 2013 that got Obama to back down at the time.

To respond to Mr. Kortunov's rhetorical question of "who after all created more problems for Russia — Democrats or Republicans?", the reader should be reminded that the Obama Administration presided over or was outright responsible for the ["Arab Spring" and its attendant regime changes](#), the [War on Syria](#), the [2011-12 anti-government unrest](#) in Moscow, EuroMaidan and the Ukrainian Civil War, the anti-Russian sanctions, and the fake news scheme of "Kremlin interference" in order to suppress Russia's publicly funded international media outlets and harass their employees, among many other examples.

In comparison, Trump merely continued most of the policy trajectories that Obama and his Secretary of State Hillary Clinton first initiated, and even then he's tried to resist some of the "deep state's" pressure when it comes to Russia, so as bad as he's been for Moscow's interests, one should wonder how much worse Hillary would have been she entered into the Presidency and allowed the "deep state" to do as it pleases.

Concluding Thoughts

Mr. Kortunov seems to have wanted to spark a serious conversation about how Russia's "deep state" should respond to the disappointment that it experienced throughout Trump's first year in office, and if that was his intention, then he remarkably succeeded by controversially reinterpreting the Obama years as something to apparently be nostalgic about and boldly suggesting that his government reconsider its negative attitude to Trump's "deep state" foes.

In the spirit of dialogue that Mr. Kortunov implicitly encouraged by publishing such a provocative piece, it's only fitting that a rebuttal be presented to challenge his premise that the Democrats and their "deep state" handlers are supposedly more preferable to Russia than Trump is, especially seeing as how he selectively pointed to a few decontextualized examples that were presumably cherry-picked in order to promote his argument.

With all due respect to this prestigious gentleman, his entire notion is flat-out wrong and shows that he doesn't at all understand Trump's "[Kraken](#)"-like leadership and his never-ending struggle to survive the "deep state's" permanent [Clintonian Counter-Revolution](#) that's being waged in trying to undermine the [Second American Revolution](#) that the President is trying to carry out in America's domestic and foreign affairs.

Instead of ignoring the plethora of evidence proving the Obama Administration's hostility to Russia and its international interests, Mr. Kortunov should have at least made a superficial reference to it because this glaring omission implies a deliberate partiality towards that political faction and the "deep state" in general, which is fine to have in principle but nevertheless casts doubt on how effective his proposals would be in the overall sense of things if they were ever put into practice.

Mr. Kortunov is evidently unaware that the same "deep state" that he finds attractive in contrast to Trump had a controlling influence in determining the Obama Administration's anti-Russian policies that the 44th President's Secretary of State Hillary Clinton ended up implementing with ruinous consequences for Moscow's grand strategic interests, and that she would have given the "deep state" free rein to do whatever it wanted had she won unlike Trump's willingness to challenge its most extreme tendencies (though with mixed results).

Having said that, **pragmatic working relations between Russia and the US' "deep states" are inevitable because there isn't any alternative to interacting with any national counterpart's collection of military, intelligence, and diplomatic figures no matter how much one may disagree with their policies** unless ties between the two sides are formally suspended, which isn't foreseeable but would in any case still allow for the existence of communication backchannels.

What Mr. Kortunov is lobbying for is something altogether different because he wants Russian decision makers to reconceptualize the American "deep state" as a 'positive', 'moderating', and 'responsible' force against what he characterizes as Trump's "romantic", "amateurish", "most exotic and potentially most dangerous foreign policy oddities", which is ironically a very "romantic" and "exotic" view to have of the US' most dangerous anti-Russian institutional forces.

In all actuality, however, the "deep state" and its Democrat allies are the real reason why Trump hasn't been able to succeed in his pledge to improve Russian-American relations, and these two problems shouldn't ever be confused as part of the solution that's needed to reverse this downward spiral, nor should a tactical partnership with these two actors ever be considered if Moscow hopes to maintain the upper hand in the [New Cold War](#).

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