



How Deep is the Deep State?

How the U.S. government continues to function in the age of Trump

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Before the Trump era, the term "[deep state](#)" brought to mind secret plots by powerful conspirators to achieve malevolent ends. Today, the White House and its allies view many government officials and bureaucrats in the Departments of State, Justice, Homeland Defense, and National Security as well as numerous regulatory agencies as the deep state. Their view of the deep state as a concentrated effort by government employees determined to do their best to sabotage the Trump agenda is deeply disturbing. I think it has the potential of inflicting serious damage to the long-term functioning of the United States at home and abroad.

Political Scientist and foreign policy experts often refer to "deep state" when speaking about emerging market countries including Egypt, Turkey, and Pakistan. These are countries who sell themselves as outwardly democratic, but who have leaders who simply defy or ignore their country's laws, rules and regulations when it does not suit them.

My view of the deep state was significantly altered in mid-July, 2018 when I attended the three-day Aspen Security Forum. The presenters included speaker and panelists from the Departments of State, Defense and Homeland Security as well as the FBI and CIA. In the audience were dozens of current and former senior government employees.

Participants in the Aspen Security Forum included Christopher Wray, the director of the FBI; Kirstjen Nielsen, Secretary of Homeland Defense; Daniel Coats, Director of National Intelligence; Rod Rosenstein, Deputy Attorney General, U.S. Department of Justice; Mark Esper, Secretary of the Army; and Paul Nakasone, Commander, U.S. Cyber Command and Direction of the National Security Agency.

Also in attendance were a number of former and Assistant and Deputy Secretaries of Defense and State. The majority of these were career government employees. Speaking with them privately, it was eminently clear that they chose government service because of a real belief in what, until this presidency, have been accepted traditional American values

John Brennan, CIA Director under President Barack Obama was the keynote speaker at last year's 2017 Aspen Security Forum. Speaking at that forum he stated that the executive branch officials have an "obligation ... to refuse to carry out" what they see as outrageous or anti-democratic orders from President Trump. It appears to me that many of these career government employees are attempting to fulfill Brennan's directive.

It's clear that Trump took office with no real strategy or ideology. It's also clear that the president has little interest in running the U.S. government. He has arbitrarily slashed agency budgets and rescinded carefully considered regulations, directives and executive actions of prior presidents. He routinely dismisses advice from his own personally chosen officials as evidenced by his tweets, statements and frequent dismissals of those people who present a different opinion. The fact that this has resulted in his losing or alienating allies at home and abroad appear to disturb him not in the least.

There is no doubt in my mind that many of these agencies have issues with a lack of accountability and are top-heavy with individuals who should be removed and/or replaced. I am no fan of big, invasive government run amok and have plenty of concern with what I see as government overreach and invasion of personal privacy.

I agree with President Trump that the unbridled authority of agencies, departments, and regulators need to be addressed by Congress. Where I differ with the president is that I do not buy into his pseudo-conspiracy theorist view that many of our senior government employees and their staffs are dangerous adversaries. Instead, I see them as attempting to protect our American way of life and our country from a dangerous and frequently irrational president.

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