

Why We Should Fear the Deep State

The notion of the “deep state” or a “state within a state” is creepy, to say the least. It indicates the existence of a shadowy group of unelected bureaucrats deeply embedded in the military-intelligence establishment secretly manipulating government policy.

[Ryan McMaken of the Mises Institute](#) defines the ‘deep state’ as “nothing more than agencies and individuals within the U.S. government that have their own interests and their own agendas.” McMaken continues:

“Only the most naïve observers of any government would deny that life-long entrenched bureaucrats don’t have their own interests separate from both the public and the public figures who ... are subject to public oversight and to elections.”

International relations scholars and public administration experts associate deep states with authoritarian regimes, such as Egypt, Turkey, Pakistan and pre-civil-war Syria. However, as [we’re finding out](#), the U.S. has its own deep state. While some media outlets portray deep state talk as [tantamount to conspiracy theory](#), the deep state is quite real.

Rumors are swirling that deep state forces are at work [undermining Donald Trump’s presidency](#). Are these mere rumors? Quite possibly. But there is also evidence to consider:

Exhibit A: The flow of relatively high-level leaks signals that someone other than the president controls the levers of power in the U.S. government. [Amanda Taub and Max Fisher of the New York Times](#) report: “Though leaks can be a normal and healthy check on a president’s power, what’s happening now ...

risks developing an entrenched culture of conflict between the president and his own bureaucracy.”

Exhibit B: The CIA backed Hilary Rodham [Clinton’s candidacy for president](#). It then relied heavily on circumstantial evidence to support its allegations that Russia colluded with the Trump campaign to dictate the election’s outcome. Journalist Glenn Greenwald, a champion of the left, [warned](#) that “cheering *for the CIA* and its shadowy allies to unilaterally subvert the U.S. election and impose its own policy dictates on the elected president is both warped and self-destructive.”

Exhibit C: National Security Advisor and retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General Michael Flynn lied to or misled Vice President Mike Pence regarding the substance of talks he had with Russian ambassador Sergey Ivanovich Kislyak. There are suspicions that Flynn’s ouster [was a “political assassination”](#) by U.S. intelligence

Exhibit D: President Trump alleges that bureaucrats loyal to the Obama administration, many of whom still hold positions in the administrative state, [wire-tapped Trump Tower](#) prior to the election. There are [reasons to believe](#) the surveillance occurred, though there is no evidence that the surveillance was politically motivated.

I’d be careful about reporting that Obama said there was no wiretapping. Statement just said that neither he nor the WH ordered it.

– Jon Favreau (@jonfavs) [March 4, 2017](#)

Why should any of this worry regular Americans?

In order to fully appreciate the deep state and the threat it poses to democracy, it’s necessary to first grasp the notion

of civil-military relations. [Professor Patricia Shields of Texas State University](#) summarizes the concept:

“Civil-military relations (CMR) deals with the myriad of policy and administration issues that arise as civilian and military sectors negotiate their place in society and on the world stage. [...] For example, CMR may involve an analysis of interactions between presidents and their military advisors, how the defense bureaucracy balances civil and military interactions, the role of culture in military organizations, methods used to recruit soldiers and private contractors work together in counterinsurgency situations and gaps in policy preferences among citizens and soldiers.”

Of course, in our democracy, the military is subordinated to civilian control. The president, though a civilian, is also the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. However, as Shields notes, once the military becomes sufficiently strong to defeat civilian militia, a paradox emerges: “Paradoxically, an effective military is then strong enough to threaten the polity itself. This paradox known as the ‘civil-military problematique’ is at the heart of CMR theory and practice.”

The threat is that when the policy preferences of unelected administrators in the military-intelligence bureaucracy diverge from those of elected leaders, the bureaucrats can choose not to carry out the orders of its civilian bosses. (For those who are still skeptical, Shields notes that “the armed forces sidestepped Clinton’s campaign promise to fully integrate gays into the military with virtually no consequence.”)

When members of the military-intelligence establishment continually disobey civilian leaders (leak information, subvert elections, ignore official policy directives, etc.), civil-military relations break down. The democratic state is put at risk of becoming a so-called banana republic, subject to military coups, or a deep-state controlled autocratic

state, similar to Turkey and Egypt, wherein former military and intelligence officers pressure a weak government to carry out their agenda.

So who's afraid of the deep state? I am.

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[Image Credit: CIA]