

Inquiring Minds topic – 28 April 2017

Roger Palms, Moderator

Deep State in America

Questions:

1. What have you read that debunks or reinforces the idea of a deep state in the U. S.?
2. Do we have enough checks and balances to avoid a situation such as we are seeing in Turkey?
3. What does it say to you that both a conservative paper (2015) and a liberal paper (2017) are talking about this same issue?
4. What can the average American citizen do in light of a possible deep state in America?

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As Leaks Multiply, Fears of a ‘Deep State’ in America

[The Interpreter](#) - By [AMANDA TAUB](#) and [MAX FISHER](#) FEB. 16, 2017 - The New York Times

WASHINGTON — A wave of leaks from government officials has hobbled the Trump administration, leading some to draw comparisons to countries like Egypt, Turkey and Pakistan, where shadowy networks within government bureaucracies, often referred to as “deep states,” undermine and coerce elected governments.

So is the United States seeing the rise of its own deep state?

Not quite, experts say, but the echoes are real — and disturbing.

Though leaks can be a normal and healthy check on a president’s power, what’s happening now extends much further. The United States, those experts warn, risks developing an entrenched culture of conflict between the president and his own bureaucracy.

What Makes a Deep State?

Though the deep state is sometimes discussed as a shadowy conspiracy, it helps to think of it instead as a political conflict between a nation’s leader and its governing institutions.

That can be deeply destabilizing, leading both sides to wield state powers like the security services or courts against one another, corrupting those institutions in the process.

In Egypt, for instance, the military and security services actively undermined [Mohamed Morsi](#), the country's democratically elected Islamist president, contributing to the upheaval that culminated in his ouster in a 2013 coup.

Turkey's president, [Recep Tayyip Erdogan](#), has battled the deep state by consolidating power for himself and, after a failed coup attempt last year, conducting vast purges.

Though American democracy is resilient enough to resist such clashes, early hints of a conflict can be tricky to spot because some push and pull between a president and his or her agencies is normal.

In 2009, for instance, military officials used [leaks](#) to pressure the White House over what it saw as the minimal number of troops necessary to send to Afghanistan.

Leaks can also be an emergency brake on policies that officials believe could be ill-advised or unlawful, such as George W. Bush-era programs on warrantless wiretapping and the Abu Ghraib detention facility in Iraq.

"You want these people to be fighting like cats and dogs over what the best policy is, airing their views, making their case and then, when it's over, accepting the decision and implementing it," said Elizabeth N. Saunders, a George Washington University political scientist. "That's the way it's supposed to work."

"Leaking is not new," she said, "but this level of leaking is pretty unprecedented."

Institutional conflicts under Mr. Trump, she worried, had grown into something larger and more concerning.

Mr. Trump, apparently seeking to cut the intelligence community, State Department, and other agencies out of the policy-making process almost entirely, may have triggered a conflict whose escalation we are seeing in the rising number of leaks.

Culture of Conflict

Officials, deprived of the usual levers for shaping policies that are supposed to be their purview, are left with little other than leaking. And the frenetic pace of Mr. Trump's executive orders, which the agencies would normally review internally over weeks or months, has them pulling that lever repeatedly.

They have leaked draft executive orders, inciting backlashes that led the orders to be shelved. And they have revealed administration efforts to circumvent usual policymaking channels, undermining Mr. Trump's ability to enact his agenda.

Mr. Trump's moves to consolidate power away from those agencies under his own authority also has them struggling to keep what they see as their crucial role in governance.

“We’re in a world now where the president is playing to the edge of his powers, and I think there are real concerns about the constitutional implications of some of the actions he’s taken,” said Amy Zegart, the co-director of the Center for International Security and Cooperation at Stanford University.

That has forced officials in agencies to ask how far they will go themselves. As each side begins to perceive itself as under attack and the other as making dangerous power-grabs, it will justify more and more extreme behavior.

Mr. Trump’s tendency to treat each leak as an attack rather than an attempt to influence policy has created an atmosphere in Washington of open institutional conflict.

Mr. Trump, in rejecting intelligence assessments that Russia intervened in the election to help him win, has risked implying that he will only accept intelligence bent to his political interests.

Mr. Trump has said he might appoint [Stephen A. Feinberg](#), a finance executive who was an early supporter of his campaign, to review the intelligence agencies.

“It looks, sounds and feels like a political witch hunt,” said Ms. Zegart. “It’s like pouring gasoline on the fire.”

“What’s happening here is that the president doesn’t even want to hear intelligence that he doesn’t agree with, and jumps to the conclusion that it must be politicized, and must be the result of people conspiring against him,” Ms. Zegart said.

By creating the perception of conflict, Mr. Trump may have made it more likely.

Officials are stuck in a difficult position: Even if each individual leak is justifiable, as insubordination becomes more sustained and overt, it inches deeper into the gray zone of counter-democratic activities.

The distinction between deep-state meddling and acceptable protest is difficult to draw in the United States, Ms. Zegart said, because this degree of opposition is so unusual.

“I don’t think you can say in advance what inappropriate deep-state activity would look like, because we haven’t seen this before,” she said.

As that gulf widens, it becomes more likely that mutual mistrust will lead the president and government bureaucracy to actively undermine one another.

When institutions with vast power to eavesdrop, fine, harass and detain see themselves as locked in a zero-sum struggle for survival, it is often basic civil liberties and democratic rights that end up in the crossfire.

Ms. Zegart said, “This war between the intelligence community and the White House is bad for the intelligence community, bad for the White House, and bad for the nation’s security.”

- The American Conservative - <http://www.theamericanconservative.com> -

Deep State America - Posted By *Philip Girdi* On July 30, 2015

It has frequently been alleged that the modern Turkish Republic operates on two levels. It has a parliamentary democracy complete with a constitution and regular elections, but there also exists a secret government that has been referred to as the [“deep state,”](#)^[1] in Turkish “Derin Devlet.”

For players in the deep state, there is no accountability and no legal limit. Everything is based on self-interest, justified through an assertion of patriotism and the national interest.

If all this sounds familiar to an American reader, it should, and given some local idiosyncrasies, it invites the question whether the United States of America has its own deep state.

First of all, one should note that for the deep state to be effective, it must be intimately associated with the development or pre-existence of a national security state. There must also be a perception that the nation is in peril, justifying extraordinary measures undertaken by brave patriots to preserve life and property of the citizenry. Those measures are generically conservative in nature, intended to protect the *status quo* with the implication that change is dangerous.

America’s deep state is completely corrupt: it exists to sell out the public interest, and includes both major political parties as well as government officials.

What makes the deep state so successful? It wins no matter who is in power, by creating bipartisan-supported money pits within the system. Monetizing the completely unnecessary and hideously expensive global war on terror benefits the senior government officials, beltway industries, and financial services that feed off it. Because it is essential to keep the money flowing, the deep state persists in promoting policies that make no sense, to include the unwinnable wars currently enjoying marquee status in Iraq/Syria and Afghanistan. The deep state knows that a fearful public will buy its product and does not even have to make much of an effort to sell it.

Of course I know that the United States of America is not Turkey. But there are lessons to be learned from its example of how a democracy can be subverted by particular interests hiding behind the mask of patriotism. Ordinary Americans frequently ask why politicians and government officials appear to be so obtuse, rarely recognizing what is actually occurring in the country. That is partly due to the fact that the political class lives in a bubble of its own creation, but it might also be because many of America’s leaders actually accept that there is an unelected, unappointed, and unaccountable presence within the system that actually manages what is taking place behind the scenes. That would be the American deep state.

Philip Girdi, a former CIA officer, is executive director of the Council for the National Interest.