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The Deep State and the Dark Arts

By Jason Hirthler
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Rejecting populism for hegemony

There's a superb scene in the movie *Syriana* where CIA bureaucrats distance themselves from one of their agents, Bob, played by George Clooney, who has become a troublesome asset for the agency. Terry, the pack leader, begins to extemporize a narrative to his subordinates. With cool detachment, he tells them: "Put some space between us and Bob. Bob has a long history of entrepreneurial operations. We haven't really had a handle on Bob for years. After 9/11, some people got a lot of leeway, let their emotions get the best of them. These are complex times. There's already an active investigation into Bob's activities in...help me out here."

At this point, the group flesh out the details of how they're going to burn the agency's connection to Bob, painting him as an agent gone rogue, slipping the net of agency supervision, defying protocol, and ultimately selling himself to unsavory elements that want a U.S. asset killed. In this way, the leviathan spits out a loyal servant, rendering him obsolete with a fable and a slander, sanctified by the imprimatur of the officialdom.

We should note the importance of the media in all this storyline, albeit fictional. The dark arts of propaganda aren't overtly mentioned, but they are the pivotal tools that will animate the destruction of Bob's career. All sound strangely familiar? It should. It's pretty much the script the intelligence community uses as its *modus operandi* when it needs to deal with an inconvenient public servant.

Theater of the Absurd

With rumors of detente crackling through the ether, the imperialist machinery of anti-Russian foreign policy has cranked into high gear, leveraging leaks and the press to mute Trump's overtures of peace. Leaks to the *The Washington Post* were leveraged in last month's excommunication of National Security Advisor Michael Flynn. Flynn was rather easily vanquished by a leak from within the American intelligence community outing him as a confabulator and, in pundit spin, a man vulnerable to blackmail by the Kremlin.

After Flynn's unceremonious ouster, Attorney General Jeff Sessions was the next target, pilloried by Democrats for his contacts with the Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak, something he declined to mention in his confirmation hearings. A third interaction has now been surmised, with tantalizing rumors Sessions was in the same room as Kislyak during a cocktail party. Did they conspire over canapes? Smuggle thumb drives wrapped in prosciutto? Exchange piquillo peppers stuffed with nuclear codes? The possibilities blossom like a mushroom cloud. Can you feel the *frisson* of treason?

Of course, the FBI has been investigating more mundane contacts between the Trump team and Moscow, a project that will either result in Trump's impeachment for some manner of treason or his complete and utter subjection to the foreign policy whims of the foreign policy establishment. A *Times* article reported that the Obama administration furiously laid the foundation for this investigation by disseminating innuendo that Trump was under Russian influence during the peace laureate's last days in office. Typically, the unofficial commentariat in the comments

thread praised Obama's patriotism, as though this wanton Wall Street servant was doing anything other than performing last-minute janitorial services for his venal party.

A few weeks ago, a Congressman (Rep. Darrell Issa) obscurely called for the appointment of a special prosecutor. But now Lindsey Graham has embraced the call, suggesting one be named if contact between Trump aides and Moscow were found, regardless of the content of that contact. It reminds one of the proverb that Caesar's wife must be above even unfounded suspicion, let alone actual wrongdoing. In any event, Graham and his monomaniacal bedmate, John McCain, continue their lurid press junket, now looking to subpoena intelligence agencies for wiretaps of Trump phone calls, though former Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper refuted the wiretap rumor, as did FBI Director James Comey, albeit by the oblique means of asking the Justice Department to do so. In any event, the banishment of Flynn, the tarring of Sessions, and the net of suspicion cast over the Trump administration are fierce warnings from a rattled foreign policy community, a modern equivalent of the severed heads of Roman soldiers set on pikes as a message from Visigoth hordes.

The enveloping of the president in a cacophony of innuendo is likely a collaborative effort between the Justice Department, the National Intelligence Agency, the CIA, and crucially, the mainstream press. Beyond the corridors of the Capitol Hill, civil-society organizations like the George Soros-funded MoveOn.org and Barack Obama's robust Organizing for Action (OFA) are turning up the heat on the streets, creating the visible signs of unrest, sometimes violent, that have capsized governments from Venezuela to Ukraine at the behest of Western oligarchs.

In recent weeks, President Donald Trump's appointment of delusional hawk H.R. McMaster as National Security Advisor, a call for an unnecessary \$54 billion dollar expansion of the military budget, his sudden demand for the return of Crimea to Ukraine, his fulminant echoes of Bush administration hysteria over Iran, among other hawkish developments, can be read as an unsettled president's efforts to appease a foreign policy establishment that is ruthlessly using the media to undermine, and reign in, a wayward steward of empire.

Full-Spectrum Dominance vs. Clear-Headed Detente

But why is Russia such a perennial target of Washington's? Why are peaceful overtures toward Moscow so scorned? As the Trump administration found out, de-escalation is a no-no in Washington. Russia, along with China, are the leading targets of American long-term foreign policy. They represent the only two nations that might seriously rival the U.S. in Eurasia, which is considered the fulcrum of the 21st century global economy. Preventing the rise of new rivals is long-standing U.S. policy, most explicitly articulated by Paul Wolfowitz on behalf of the Clinton administration in early 1990s.

None of this should come as a surprise. Consider what was at stake. At the macro level, the entire program for global hegemony is under threat. Outlined over decades by foreign policy luminaries such as George Kennan, Allen Dulles, Wolfowitz, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, the general plan is for full-spectrum dominance, meaning control of land, sea, air, and space, on a planetary basis, with a special emphasis on "Eurasian landmass," as the ghoulish McMaster called it in a recent anti-Russian speech.

If history is any guide, it is unacceptable for a U.S. president to thaw relations with Russia unless that thaw consists of Russia capitulating to American demands. Mikhail Gorbachev's trusting dismantling of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact led to a decade of Western looting of Gorbachev's country. Vladimir Putin has since restored a measure of Russia's economic and military strength. Where Gorbachev was exploited, Putin is proving resistant to such entreaties, except on the economic front, where he appears to have bought into some of Western neoliberal policy.

Instead, Putin is posing a threat to the forward progress of Washington's neoconservative foreign policy. He has actively promoted a variety of pipeline projects that would speed Russian oil and gas to Western Europe, undercutting profits of Western multinationals and addicting NATO nations to the energy teat of the Russian Federation. And he has conducted a few military maneuvers that have enraged the Washington elite, which are used to being conciliated by effete comprador elite in developing nations. This is different. A nuclear nation that can't be overrun or bombed into submission. And it shows.

After successfully dismembering Yugoslavia, Congo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, the West-led spread of chaos across the Middle East stalled in Syria. After happily expanding NATO throughout Eastern Europe with little opposition, expansion hit a wall in Ukraine. In both instances, it is Moscow behind the holding action preventing the American project of global dominion from advancing. That's why Putin has replaced Hugo Chavez as the West's most demonized public figure.

Worryingly for covetous D.C. schemers, there's a lot of new economic activity afoot in Eurasia, little of it involving the U.S. This activity includes plans for a Eurasian Union headed by Russia, a metastasizing Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the rapidly advancing One Belt, One Road vision of the Chinese. The latter would effectively be a New Silk Road stretching from Vladivostok to Lisbon, animating Chinese and Russian economic influence across the Asian and European continents, and lifting countries like Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. This is Washington's nightmare scenario, since no serious geo-strategist believes global hegemony is feasible short of dominion in Central Asia. This understanding fuels the underlying animus toward Moscow and Beijing. It has nothing to do with ceaseless repeated lies about Russian aggression in Eastern Europe and Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. And it has nothing to do with lies about Moscow rigging the election for Donald Trump or Michael Flynn lifting sanctions in a nefarious *quid pro quo*.

The Deep State vs. the Nation State

Long-time Congressional staffer Mike Lofgren refers to the murky agencies at work to ensure this planetary plan stays on track as the "deep state," in his book of the same name. He writes that it includes key elements of the national security state, which ensure continuity of policy despite the superficial about-faces from one administration to the next. The deep state is effectively a warlike oligarchy, hell-bent on full spectrum dominance, driven by a lust for wealth and power, and anxious to inscribe its name in history. Specifically, Lofgren says, the deep state includes the Department of Defense, the State Department, the National Intelligence Agencies, Wall Street, the defense industry, and the energy consortium, among other major private players.

They share common agendas, operate a revolving door of employees, and have a collective distaste for democracy, transparency, and regulation. The deep state is the link between military interventions and trans-pacific trade deals, between sanctions and IMF loans. All of these tools, be they arms or loans or legal structures, serve a single purpose: the overarching control of world resources by a global community of corporate elites. One can also see how these three instruments of policy and power all do tremendous damage to a particular entity, the nation-state. It is the nation-state that is considered by elites to be the sole remaining barricade between populations in nominal democracies and their unfettered exploitation by multinationals, although one might reasonably argue that the state more often abets exploitation rather than deters it.

The Dystopia to Come

So where is this all headed? Aside from the theatrics of the Trump presidency and its sequestration or removal. What would full-spectrum dominance look like? Probably something like a one-world market, populated by enfeebled states, ruled by a worldwide raft of interlocking investor rights agreements that allowed private capital to plunder natural resources free of state restraints, such as labor safeguards, environmental protections, reasonable tax regimes, capital controls or border tariffs. Faceless multinationals would pillage the planet, their anonymous appointees manning the joysticks of power behind the reflective glass of their cloud-draped spindles, unreachable and unelected by the armies of the destitute that prowled the wastelands below. The amalgamated forces of corporate elitism would coolly play labor arbitrage across continents, threaten and destroy defiant economies through currency flight and commodity manipulation, and continue to consume an outsized percentage of the world's resources. This would fulfill the hegemonic dreams of former State Department Director of Policy Planning Kennan, who once argued that we must dispense with humanitarian concerns and “deal in straight power concepts,” the better to control and consume an outsized portion of the world's resources, presumably a privilege reserved for elite whites, and a selection of mandarins from other ethnicities with special clearances.

A criminal corporate commonwealth, supported by a fiat dollar as global reserve currency enforced by threat of war and economic collapse, will be deaf to protest from below, its weaponized satellites aimed at populations like sunlit magnifiers at a column of ants. Currency itself would be wholly digitized. This move would be sold as a positive advance as it would provide better tax accountability and therefore fund future programs of social uplift. Rather it will be employed as a means of totalitarian financial control over populations. Their wealth will be institutionalized. The concept of withdrawal will fade along with the fiction of ownership.

Terrorism will become the chosen tool of this elite power (insofar as it isn't already). Surgical strikes, be they military, economic, or news-driven, will “keep the rabble in line” as all societies become subservient to the portents of war, the fear of inaccessible funds, and the black smears of an amoral media. The ‘deep state’ will become an obsolete term, as the nation-state will recede in memory as a relic of a strife-ridden dark age.

After all, the *laissez faire* cult of the beltway actually believes the planet would prosper sans nation-states. As another scene from *Syriana* reminds us, elite capital has a very different worldview from the majority of labor, who continue to believe the state has a role to play

defending their interests. At one point in the film, Texas oil man Danny Dalton lectures lawyer Bennett Holiday on the true definition of corruption, “Corruption!? Corruption is government interference in market efficiencies in the form of government regulation. That’s Milton Friedman! He got a goddamn Nobel Prize!” The U.S. already practices free-market militarism, refusing to recognize borders, legal constraints, or geostrategic jurisdiction. Why not free-market finance and trade?

The good news is that, if you can clamber into the top one percent of the U.S. population, for instance, serving as a parasite on the grizzled hide of the corporate beast, you might yet partake of unimaginable luxuries, high in the clouds, sipping Mimosas as you transit between the ring-fenced metropolises of the world, where stateless elites intermingle.