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The Deep State

By Serge Halimi
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When a head of state who behaves impulsively, and shows little interest in filling in the gaps in his knowledge, becomes commander in chief of the world's most powerful army, there need to be plenty of safeguards.

Yet, after President Donald Trump ordered his generals to bomb Syria and execute naval manoeuvres in Asia, he won the approval of US politicians, Republicans and Democrats alike, as well as almost all the media, including Europe's. (A French national daily described the strikes on Syria as 'somehow liberating' (1).)

The 59 missiles fired at an air base in the Middle East turned a president mired in unpopularity, amateurism and nepotism into a determined and sensitive man, unable to contain his humanity on seeing photographs of 'beautiful babies ... cruelly murdered in [a] very barbaric attack.' The symphony of praise was all the more worrying in a climate of international tension, because Trump loves adulation.

In January 1961, three days before leaving office, Republican president Dwight Eisenhower warned Americans against a military-industrial complex whose 'total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every statehouse, every office of the Federal government.'

Judging by the U-turns Trump has made, the complex has not been idle over the past few weeks. On 15 January Trump said NATO was ‘obsolete’; on 13 April, it was ‘no longer obsolete’. A few months ago he was counting on Russia becoming an ‘ally’; on 12 April he said relations with Moscow ‘may be at an all-time low.’

For Russian prime minister Dmitry Medvedev, no sooner had ‘the last remaining election fog’ lifted than Trump was ‘broken by the existing power machine’ in Washington, back under the control of the deep state, which never allows itself to be distracted from its strategic priorities by a change of occupant at the White House. The Republicans and Democrats most nostalgic for the cold war can rejoice that, though Trump may resemble a puppet, at least it’s not a Russian one (2).

If Eisenhower were alive today, he would probably include the media in his military-industrial complex. Rolling news likes permanent tension and loves war; and pundits are all the more ready to utter bellicose statements because it is no longer conscripts, potentially their sons, who die in conflicts, but ‘volunteers’, often working-class. The major US newspapers published 47 editorials on the US strikes on Syria. Only one opposed them (3).

Translated by Charles Goulden

(1) *Libération*, Paris, 9 April 2017.

(2) See Serge Halimi, ‘All Russian puppets?’, *Le Monde diplomatique*, English edition, January 2017.

(3) Adam Johnson, ‘Out of 47 major editorials on Trump’s Syria strikes, only one opposed’, FAIR, 11 April 2017.