

The Imagined "Deep State"
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Throughout the ages, paranoid people have believed that whoever governs them has many secrets, most aimed at harming the mass of subjects. Demagogues have always been able to plug in on this suspicion of government, and our time is no different.

Although we are a republic electing our presidents for finite terms of office (maximum of eight year), most of our other elected officials (House of Representatives Senators, and state governors) have no term limits, and can be replaced in an election. Some judges are elected and can be replaced, but most are lifetime appointments. Certain appointed officers, such as the head of the FBI, has a 10-year term limit, but can be removed by a president at will.

Despite these important and public offices, there is an entire world of professionals, public servants, who do their work mostly out of the view of voters. The State Department and the intelligence community must do some of their work below the radar. It is impossible for all governing to run in full daylight, but even with classified operations, the elected officials do have oversight. This has not always been true, but is so today.

There is no secret cabal of professionals today working in the dark for their own purposes. The believers in the "deep state," however, remain paranoid about secret powers that manipulate events.

Today's civil service is nothing like the government spoils system of the past. When Andrew Jackson became president (and thereafter through much of the 19th century), civil servants would be fired and a new group of the president's choice be brought in. This flawed system came to an end when President Grant pushed for a law creating a United State Civil Service Commission in 1871, mandating that officials hold office through merit, not through political connections. The commission was funded for two years, but Congress, which relied heavily on patronage, especially the Senate, did not renew funding.

President Grant's successor, Rutherford B. Hayes, requested a renewal of funding, but none was granted. His efforts against the spoils system, also known as patronage, were cut short after his successor, Garfield, was assassinated.

Despite the Senate's resistance, public pressure and successive presidents tried to make the Civil Service Reform permanent. The Pendleton Act renewed funding for the Civil Service Commission and established a three-man commission to run Civil Service whose commissioners were chosen by President Arthur. The Pendleton law required certain applicants to take the civil service exam in order to be given certain jobs; it also prevented elected officials and political appointees from firing civil servants, removing civil servants from the influences of political patronage and partisan behavior.

President Arthur and succeeding presidents continued to expand the authority of the Civil Service Commission and federal departments that the Civil Service covered. The Civil Service Commission, in addition to reducing patronage, also alleviated the burdensome task of the President of the United States in appointing federal office seekers.

Amendments of this law continued until the mid 1970s, when the Civil Service Commission was replaced by the office of Management and Budget. Our government officers since that time have proven to be non-partisan, professional, and in no way resembling the paranoid notion of a secret government, a deep state. It just isn't so.

Today, we are living through a presidency in which all civil servants are disparaged and even those appointed to directly serve the presidency are a revolving door of firings or leaving.

The professionals in such essential agencies as the State Department, CIA, and FBI, and Defense, are regularly attacked as "deep state" by this president until these agencies, particularly State Department, are being hollowed out of personnel. It takes years to accumulate the expertise of these professionals who dedicate their lives to serving our country. We are starting to miss the very people we need to steer us clear of a president with no policy, but with complete faith in his own "great and unmatched wisdom."

Today, these brave civil servants risk everything to testify before the Impeachment Committees, despite death threats and crushing legal expenses. Patriotism is still alive in our country.

685 words

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