

Yes, Virginia, There is a Deep State

Since the “Russiagate” probe began, US president Donald Trump and his supporters have used lots of bandwidth raging against what they refer to as the “Deep State.” Does the Deep State exist? If so, what is it, and are its forces arrayed specifically against Donald Trump and his administration?

Yes, the Deep State exists — probably more so at one end of its numerous definitions and less so at the other, but to some degree at both ends.

At the seemingly more benign end, the Deep State is simply what one might think of as the “permanent government” — the army of bureaucrats and functionaries whose careers span multiple administrations. Like all career employees of large organizations as groups, they tend to fear and resist change, and their sheer mass has an inertial effect. They energetically do things the old way and drag their feet on new things.

At the end dismissed by mainstream commentators as “conspiracy theory,” the Deep State is an invisible second government which acts in a coordinated manner to protect its prerogatives and advance its interests and favored policies versus changes supposedly demanded by “the people” via their elected representatives in Congress and the presidency. The premier example of this view is the claim that John F. Kennedy was assassinated by the CIA and the military industrial complex because (in one version) he was about to get the US out of Vietnam.

If that end of the spectrum sounds crazy to you, consider:

Former FBI attorney Lisa Page and former FBI deputy counterintelligence chief Peter Strzok, while working on a pre-election investigation into alleged collusion between Donald Trump’s presidential campaign and the Russian government, exchanged text messages with incendiary content such as “there’s no way [Trump] gets elected — but I’m afraid we can’t take that risk.”

In mid-May, it emerged that an FBI informant approached two or three (reports vary) advisers to Trump’s campaign during the same period to pry into those advisers’ alleged ties to the Russian government.

Is President Trump stretching the reports we’ve seen when he tweets “Reports are there was indeed at least one FBI representative implanted, for political purposes, into my campaign for president. It took place very early on, and long before the phony Russia Hoax became a ‘hot’ Fake News story?”

Well, maybe. But not by much. On any fair reading, those two stories combined do look a

lot like the second definition of Deep State skulduggery. The FBI was meddling in — acting to influence or in extremis overturn — a US presidential election (sound familiar?). The messages between Page and Strzok color that meddling as intentional Bureau political action, not as incidental investigative fallout which just happened to touch on the election.

While I disagree with President Trump on most issues, it's hard to disagree with him when he rails against a transparently political witch hunt that has dragged on for more than a year visibly and for months before that beneath the surface. The Deep State is real. And dangerous.