



## Episode 857: Trump and the Deep State

Guest: Phil Giraldi

**WOODS:** I'm very curious about this whole matter of the deep state. It's kind of floating a little bit out of the news these days, but it's still in the background and I wonder if, as a member of the intelligence community yourself and in the past, you might be able to explain to us what is meant by the term deep state, or what ought to be meant by it, if there's anything to it, if there's anything sinister to it, or if this is just a whole lot of propagandistic and conspiratorial hype.

**GIRALDI:** Well, that's a whole bunch of questions. The deep state really is a concept that arose after the Second World War, and it applied to countries like Turkey, and in fact, specifically Turkey, because Turkey was perceived as having a state within a state, whereby most of the decision making on major issues was conducted not through the popular assembly or the prime minister's office, but rather through this sort of murky sub-establishment that wielded the real power in the country. In Turkey, it combined ex-members of the security services, police, politicians, businessmen in kind of a network. So that's where it comes from, and the concept was that this was a system that was contrary to democratic norms and that was the danger of it.

The expression continues to be used in places like the United States, and I think sometimes it might be more understandable to the American public if we just refer to it in a different way. I mean, you could call it the establishment, in a way, because in the United States it operates much more in the open, and the collaboration between Wall Street and Washington is essentially how the deep state operates in the United States.

**WOODS:** All right, so then let's talk about the disturbing comments by – remember Chuck Schumer basically warning Trump that, in effect, he's playing with fire if you go up against the intelligence agencies? And he didn't elaborate on this, but I don't think he had to. What do you think that was all about?

**GIRALDI:** Well, I think that was an interesting comment. I think what it meant when he said it was that the intelligence agencies are very well wired into Washington and the media, and they have lots of ways to get back at you and against you if you say or do the wrong thing. So in a sense, he was saying, Watch out for the revenge mode that the intelligence communities can engage in. But I think we have now seen in the case of Michael Flynn that this is done to a whole new level. It looks to me at any rate as if the intelligence agencies or law enforcement – this might be an FBI issue – essentially

engineered his downfall, and they did so by leaking information that they had access to to the media and to certain politicians, and this led to all kinds of consequences.

Now this is when it becomes dangerous, where suddenly the deep state, if you want to call it that, the intelligence community is able to essentially overturn policies and political appointees that come in with a new administration. This is something quite frightening.

**WOODS:** I've thought of that term, deep state, as I guess obviously including the intelligence agencies, but somehow going beyond that. I've thought of the deep state as being the reason that — with the exception of Trump, who actually has made some changes that I wouldn't have expected from most politicians — for the most part, we get a lot of continuity from administrations. Between Bush and Obama there was more continuity than you would expect. Between Clinton and Bush there was more continuity than you would expect. There's got to be some reason that, no matter who gets elected, by and large the machine just continues on. And I've, in my not very deep analysis, just attributed this to the deep state, that there's something running the show other than the guy I'm seeing on television. Am I being crazy to think that way?

**GIRALDI:** No, I think you're completely accurate. I think the — as I say, if you think of this in terms of the establishment and how the establishment has certain operating principles and has certain ways of rewarding people inside and outside the government to essentially play the game by these rules, then I think that's where we're getting close to what the deep state is.

I think that what we see is, for example, we have policies that essentially go unchallenged, and I would cite, for example, when is the last time the American public got to vote on the continuous wars we've been fighting for the last 15 years? When is the American public really given a say in terms of the financial community and how the financial community operates and what impact it has on their daily lives? Or more recently, the whole issue of health care. There are never any serious debates on these issues. There are tweaks in the system where it goes from one kind of position to another, but essentially, there is an establishment force, and establishment consensus which makes the decisions on these things.

**WOODS:** Why do you think the deep state or whatever — I get why — Let's disaggregate this a bit. I get why the establishment didn't like Donald Trump. That's obvious enough. But the intelligence community in particular, it can't just be, well, he's been bad mouthing them or criticizing them. He didn't start doing that until he already had the sense that they were after them. Now, it could be that he had the intention of instituting a new foreign policy or something, but as I look at it, the only thing that's new is that it looks like it could be more bellicose and uncomprehending than ever, and the people he's surrounding himself with certainly don't seem friendly to Russia. So everything we were warned about, that he might pull back on the wars and that he might make friends with Russia, I'm not sure that's actually materializing anyway. So what the heck could they have against him? It can't just be that he's thought about cutting back the budgets of these agencies. Could it really be that petty?

**GIRALDI:** Well, I don't think he's going to cut back on the budgets. I think he's made clear that he's going to have, as you put it, a bellicose policy, which will involve the intelligence community. I think there are a couple of issues that seem to surface for me. I think the Russia issue is a real issue, because the Russia issue entails a lot of other things like Syria, Eastern Europe. I think there is a consensus, a broad consensus among the establishment, within the establishment that any kind of rapprochement with Russia is undesirable. So I think there is a certain extent of Russia playing into this. Plus, if you're a Democrat, you very much want to have the Russia conspiracy as an explanation to your own political basis for why you haven't succeeded in the recent election. So there is a motive there.

And I think when we talk about the intelligence community, it's important to analyze what that means. The intelligence community is basically 20,000 people like me who essentially are in a certain circumstance where they perform a job of a certain type, and they do their jobs and they're loyal to whatever government is in place. But at the top of these organizations, you have people that are heavily politicized, and I would say if you're saying, Where is the deep state or where is the establishment in the intelligence community? It's these guys at the top. And these guys are the ones that were particularly miffed by Trump and his comments. Plus, these guys lost their status and lost their future employment when Trump was elected. So they have an agenda, and I think if we're looking for specific players who have something that they want to — a message that they want to send to the new president, these would be the people.

**WOODS:** Who do you think could possibly have the access necessary to be leaking the contents of some of Trump's phone calls?

**GIRALDI:** Yeah, that's an interesting question. This kind of information, as you might imagine, is extremely tightly held within the intelligence community. If there is a transcript — I'm sure there are transcripts of Flynn speaking with the Russian ambassador or with other government officials in other countries — these transcripts probably move around where whoever is receiving it has to sign for it, has to put a time and a date on it, and whoever gets it next has to sign for it. These things are very, very, very tightly held. So it's a very limited group of people who would have had access to this kind of information: at FBI, at NSA, at CIA. And it clearly was someone from within that circle who made the decision to move ahead with this lead of information.

**WOODS:** Yeah, that is really amazing. I don't remember cases of this happening, where the president's private calls to foreign leaders were having excerpts leaked. Is there precedent for that?

**GIRALDI:** No, I don't think there is, and I think we have to look at this for what it is, which is a major breach of security. I would only point out from an intelligence officer's point of view that revealing to the Russians that we're able to listen in on their phone calls would mean that they will be taking security measures so that won't happen again in the future. And whether you like that kind of practice or not, the ability to find out what the Russians are saying on the phone will have vanished. So it had a serious impact in terms of monitoring Russian activity in the United States, again, whether that's a good thing or bad. But nevertheless, it has a real-life impact.

**WOODS:** I want to read one paragraph from your article that I'm going to link to. This is Episode 857. Linking to it at [TomWoods.com/857](http://TomWoods.com/857). It's your article "Deep State America" from a couple of years ago. I want to just read this paragraph and get your comment. You say:

"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 otherwise 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."

That paragraph seems to hold up pretty well a couple years later.

**GIRALDI:** Yeah, it really does. There's always a — I don't know who coined the expression, "Follow the money," but whoever did, he was a genius. When you get right down to it, the players in this, whether again you're going to call it deep state or just a kind of establishment — whatever you want to call it, they're largely motivated by personal profiles where they have status in the government, and they're motivated by money. And you see it every day, literally, when congressmen leave, they join a lobbying firm; the lobbying firm then turns around and legislates in favor of the clients of the lobbying firm, and the clients in turn dump money on the former congressman. It's not just congressmen; it's military officers; it's senior intelligence officers. Everyone knows that to play in the system and not bend the rules is highly beneficial.

**WOODS:** Let me shift gears for a minute, because I know that you and I have very similar views on foreign policy, and I think you and I thought there was some modicum of a possibility that somebody who's more independent and who's not part of the system might have some chance of changing the foreign policy, especially given that he talks about the foolishness of a couple of the previous wars. He even uses the forbidden term "America first." But apparently "America first" means fighting wars in Syria and continuing to intervene in Yemen. That's not how I interpret the term "America first." I think you'd have to twist yourself into a pretzel to make those things compatible.

And this is why I — I get criticized by a lot of Trump supporters who thought I was just a pointy-head when I would say the problem with Trump is that he has no intellectual curiosity. He's got no desire to form systematic views that are grounded in something or to really read and become informed. He's just got a lot of impressions. Now, that's not to say he's not a smart guy, because on some level he is a smart guy. But the fact that he could simultaneously hold in his mind, "The foreign policy establishment has screwed up beyond believe, but I want to press forward with their overall strategy," something's wrong there. So what have been your thoughts in watching his foreign policy and his foreign policy team unfold?

**GIRALDI:** Well, I share what you said. Basically he doesn't seem to have what we would call a policy. He has a series of emotional and half-thought-out responses to specific

situations. And this is dangerous. The whole idea that Iran is eternally a bad guy and can't be a party to any constructive activity in the Middle East is foolish, and buying completely into the Saudi and Israeli view of what Iran represents and what's going on in Syria is equally dangerous.

I suspect he will surprise us in terms of doing some things that we would consider to be the right thing. I really liked his comment when he was interviewed the week before last, where he was questioned by Bill O'Reilly about killing that — that Putin was a killer, and his response was that, you know, we're not exactly innocent in that regard too. That's a sensible response, and I hope that — and I pray — that he will do the sensible thing by Russia, which is not necessarily to acquiesce in terms of Russian policies and things like that, but to find some comfortable middle ground where we can work with the Russians and the Russians would be willing to work with us. I think that's absolutely essential. I think it's the number one foreign policy issue. He might just do that.

I think he's going to blunder around in the Middle East, just like his predecessors have, and I hope at a certain point he'll realize that the military option is not a very good option at all and that he will have to do more in terms of diplomacy, in terms of — I hate to call it coalition building, but at least relationship building with the various groups that are engaged in the Middle East. And I think and I hope that he gradually will indeed minimize the U.S. role in the Middle East.

**WOODS:** Is there any appointment he's made anywhere in the foreign policy world that has pleased or not horrified you?

**GIRALDI:** I think the Secretary of State is not a bad choice. I think our two generals are not bad choices either. One has to I think differentiate between people who are talking as generals and saying things about enemies, because the purpose of a general is to defeat adversaries, and people who are now in a more serious position where they have to be thinking in terms of policy. They're both bright men, and they have shown some signs of being pragmatic. So I'm not displeased by the foreign policy team. I do know in today's paper they're talking about how the State Department has been excluded from many of the foreign policy discussions that have taken place up to now. That's somewhat of a bad sign. But we shall see where it goes.

**WOODS:** You know, I don't doubt that there are many millions of people who really strongly dislike Donald Trump. — and dislike way, way out of proportion to the proper level of dislike that somebody might have. I mean, they think he's going to throw homosexuals into detention camps or some bizarre ideas that obviously never in a million years would cross his mind. But having said that, there's a part of me that thinks there's something fishy about all the protests, that there are so many of them, their numbers are so great. Do you think this is just a spontaneous outpouring of left-wing outrage, or do you think there's something more sinister at work?

**GIRALDI:** Well, I think one should describe these demonstrations as highly organized. There are groups that are clearly revealing money — have received money to organize these events. But you know, this hatred of Trump goes back quite a ways. It was evident during the campaign, where Trump was receiving nothing but negative coverage and his opponent was getting softballs thrown at her. And so there is —

again, this goes back to the deep state, doesn't it? This goes back to the establishment and what the establishment wanted to see in the candidate, and Hillary Clinton was a perfect candidate and Donald Trump was the antithesis of that. And so yes, I think this stuff is being organized. It's being supported, and I agree with you absolutely.

But what do they expect Trump to do? He's not going to be throwing people into jail because they're the wrong ethnic group or something like that. He doesn't have the power to do that, apart from anything else. I think that what we're seeing is a resurgence to a certain extent of the old left, which you and I probably remember from our younger days. And it's definitely getting some support from outside. Whether this has any long-term legs and it can keep going, I kind of doubt. I think a lot of these issues will go away, but we have to assume that the media in particular will continue to be very anti-Trump, and that will fuel a lot of opposition to him.

**WOODS:** Now, we can't know what's going to happen in 2020. Let's just then for argument's sake talk about 2024. There's nothing the deep state would like more than for the Republican Party to go back to nominating Mitt Romney, whoever the Mitt Romney of the day turns out to be. Do you think Trump manages to have a long-term, lasting effect on the direction of the Republican Party, or do you think after Trump it's back to Romney, McCain, Dole as far as the eye can see?

**GIRALDI:** I fear that the Trump phenomenon is time sensitive. It's going to have some effect. There are going to be some people that will be happy with his performance and many others that will not be. And I fear that, again, if we get back to the concept of deep state and establishment politics, we will see that the Republicans will opt for establishment politics. I don't think that Trumpism as a populist movement necessarily has a long shelf life. And let's face it. In eight years, there are a lot of political changes that are going inevitably to take place, and that will influence how the electorate and the Republican Party sees itself at that time.

**WOODS:** Well, I guess this is all highly speculative anyway, but I'm kind of inclined in your direction, and certainly he would have to make a really deliberate effort to get his people in the right places and to organize at the precinct level and be involved in their local party, and he'd have to have training manuals — he'd have to have a real, nationwide program in place to get his version of the party to stick, and he doesn't seem to have any intention of doing that. And so if he doesn't do that, then I think it does go back to Mitt Romney.

**GIRALDI:** Yeah, I think so. I think basically the Republican Party, it's basically run by an oligarchy, just like the Democrats are. And the fact is this oligarchy likes its perks; it likes its money; it likes its access to power and so on and so forth. And they see themselves playing this certain role, and I think this role is, again, if we consider establishment deep state, however you want to define it, these are the people that essentially are the driving force in this. And they're going to go back to what they feel comfortable with.

**WOODS:** Well, that is — I think that's a wrap for today, Phil, but I appreciate your answers and your help in sorting all this out. These are really bizarre times we're living through, and I appreciate your help in guiding us through it. Thanks so much.

**GIRALDI:** Absolutely. Thank you.