

The Pentagon Speaks

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The Joint Chiefs of Staff have spoken. Issuing a remarkable [memorandum](#) to all members of the Armed Forces, the JCS have declared that Joe Biden will be the new president of the United States. The memo may have been not only one to military personnel but also to President Trump: No matter how convinced you are that the election was stolen from you, don't even think about remaining in power because we will ensure your forcible exit from the White House.

Unfortunately, relatively few people, including libertarians, comprehend that the Pentagon, along with the CIA and the NSA and, to a certain extent, the FBI, are the part of the federal government in which ultimate power is being wielded. They are the ones who are ruling the roost in America. That's why that memo is so important. It's declaring how things will be.

This overwhelming power is usually exercised behind the scenes in order to make Americans feel comfortable that their government is different from other national-security governments. While the national-security branch of the government is driving the overall direction America will take, especially with respect to foreign affairs, it permits the other three branches to maintain the appearance of power. The idea is to convince Americans that the federal government operates the same as a national-security state as it did when it was a limited-government republic.

But it's a lie, a very dangerous lie, one that unfortunately is lived by all too many Americans, especially those within the mainstream press.

If you haven't read the book [National Security and Double Government](#) by Michael J. Glennon, you owe it to yourself to do so. This is Glennon's thesis — that the national-security establishment is the part of the federal government that is wielding and exercising the ultimate power within the governmental structure. At the same time, however, it permits the legislative, judicial, and executive parts of the government to continue appearing to be in charge.

Glennon is not some crackpot writer. He is professor of international law at the Fletcher School at Tufts University. He has served as a consultant to various congressional committees, the U.S. State Department, and the International Atomic Energy Agency. You can read a more complete biography [here](#).

If Glennon is right — I am firmly believe that he is — then it requires people, including libertarians, to reevaluate everything they understand about the country, especially foreign affairs.

Consider, for example, the many laments against America's "forever wars." It's a popular mantra, including among libertarians. But what good does it do to complain about "forever wars" if the root cause of such wars is left in place, where it is in charge?

In other words, the national-security establishment needs those forever wars, just as it needed the Cold War. Any national-security state necessarily depends of fear, crises, chaos, and emergencies — or "threats" of such things to sustain its existence, its power, and its money. They will always find something for people to be afraid of, even if they have to instigate it. Communism, terrorism, drug dealers, illegal immigrants, Muslims, Russia, China, North Korea, Cuba, ISIS, al-Qaeda, Iran, Syria, insurrectionists, revolutionaries, invaders, or whatever. Without such fearful things, people are apt to ask why they need a national-security state instead of a limited-government republic, which was the type of governmental structure on which America was founded.

What is the distinguishing characteristic of a national-security state, as compared to a limited-government republic? Power — raw, unadulterated power. With its vast military and arsenal of weaponry, along with extreme powers of assassination and surveillance, a national-security establishment has the means of imposing its will on government and on society. No one wields the countervailing power to resist.

This why precisely why our American ancestors opposed the creation of a national-security state or what they called "standing armies." They understood that once such a governmental apparatus comes into existence, there is no practical way for the citizenry, even a well-armed citizenry, to oppose it. In fact, if the Constitutional Convention had proposed a Constitution that called into existence a federal government that was a national-security state, rather than a limited-government republic, there is no way that Americans would have approved the Constitution.

Practically from the beginning of the conversion to a national-security state, the other three branches have deferred to the overwhelming power of the Pentagon and its vast military-industrial complex, the CIA, and the NSA. All three of those branches have understood the nature of power.

For example, in the 1950s the Pentagon insisted that the Supreme Court grant it a state-secrets doctrine. Ordinarily, that is a legislative function; that's the way things are ordinarily done in a democracy. The Supreme Court went along with what the Pentagon wanted, thereby circumventing the legislative process.

Consider assassination. The Constitution did not delegate such a power to the federal government. The Bill of Rights expressly prohibits the federal government from killing anyone without due process of law. Nonetheless, when the national-security establishment insisted on having the power to assassinate people, including Americans, the Supreme Court acceded to its demand.

Look at Gtmo, where people have been held for for more than a decade without trial. Never mind that the Bill of Rights requires the federal government to grant people speedy trials. That doesn't matter when it comes to the military and the CIA. The federal judiciary is not going to interfere.

Congress has proven to be just as deferential. For one thing, Congress is filled with people who could be considered to be self-designated assets of the national-security

establishment. This especially includes the military and CIA veterans. They are almost certain to go along with whatever the national-security establishment wants. For those who strenuously object, they encounter the threat of having military bases or projects in their districts canceled, in which case the mainstream media in their districts will go after them with a vengeance. And there is always the possibility of being “Hoovered” with the threat of having friendly assets in the mainstream press reveal compromising secrets about one’s personal life.

And woe to any president who takes on the national-security establishment. They all know this. That’s why there hasn’t been a president since John F. Kennedy willing to challenge them. For a while it looked like Trump was going to do so but it wasn’t long before Americans saw that he too quickly fell into line.

It’s time for Americans to do some serious soul-searching and to ask themselves some penetrating questions: Is a root cause of America’s many woes the fact that it is a national-security state, just like China, Russia, and North Korea? Is it time to restore America’s founding system of a limited-government republic? Which governmental structure is more likely to lead to liberty, peace, prosperity, and harmony?

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