

Pompeo and Haspel Are Symptoms of a Deeper Problem

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President Trump's recent cabinet shake-up looks to be a real boost to hard-line militarism and neo-conservatism. If his nominees to head the State Department and CIA are confirmed, we may well have moved closer to war.

Before being chosen by Trump to head up the CIA, Secretary of State nominee Mike Pompeo was one of the most pro-war Members of Congress. He has been militantly hostile toward Iran, and many times has erroneously claimed that Iran is the world's number one state sponsor of terror. The truth is, Iran neither attacks nor threatens the United States.

At a time when President Trump appears set to make history by meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong-un face-to-face, Pompeo remains dedicated to a "regime change" policy that leads to war, not diplomacy and peace. He blames Iran – rather than the 2003 US invasion – for the ongoing disaster in Iraq. He enthusiastically embraced the Bush policy of "enhanced interrogation," which the rest of us call "torture."

Speaking of torture, even if some of the details of Trump's CIA nominee Gina Haspel's involvement in the torture of Abu Zubaydah are disputed, the mere fact that she helped develop an interrogation regimen that our own government admitted was torture, that she oversaw an infamous "black site" where torture took place, and that she covered up the evidence of her crimes should automatically disqualify her for further government service.

In a society that actually valued the rule of law, Haspel may be facing time in a much different kind of federal facility than CIA headquarters.

While it may be disappointing to see people like Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State and Gina Haspel as the head of the CIA, it shouldn't be all that surprising. The few areas where President Trump's actions are consistent with candidate Trump's promises are ripping up the nuclear deal with Iran and embracing the torture policies of President George W. Bush. Candidate Trump in late 2015 promised to bring back waterboarding "and a whole lot worse" if he became president. It seems that is his intention with the elevation of Pompeo and Haspel to the most senior positions in his Administration.

We should be concerned, of course, but the real problem is not really Mike Pompeo or Gina Haspel. It is partly true that "personnel is policy," but it's more than just that. It matters less who fills the position of Secretary of State or CIA director when the real issue is that both federal agencies are routinely engaged in activities that are both unconstitutional and anti-American. It is the current Executive Branch over-reach that threatens our republic more

than the individuals who fill positions in that Executive Branch. As long as Congress refuses to exercise its Constitutional authority and oversight obligations – especially in matters of war and peace – we will continue our slide toward authoritarianism, where the president becomes a kind of king who takes us to war whenever he wishes.

I am heartened to see some Senators – including Sen. Rand Paul – pledging to oppose President Trump’s nominees for State and CIA. Let’s hope many more join him – and let’s hope the rest of the Congress wakes up to its role as first among equals in our political system!

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