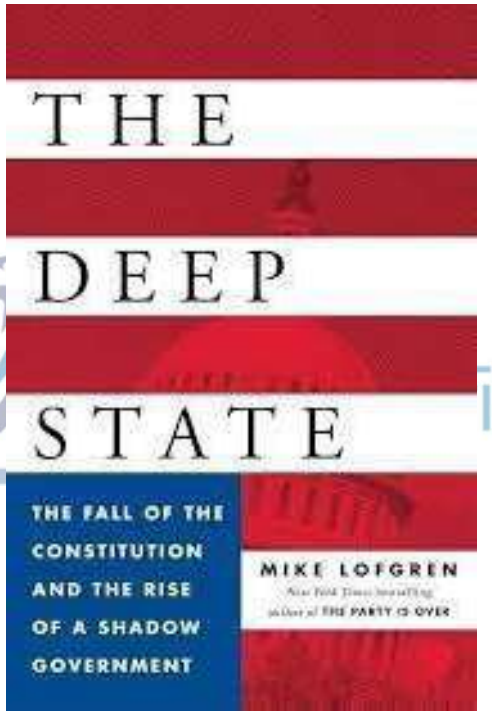
Book Review

The Deep State

Author: Mike Lofgren

Mike Lofgren is an American author and a former Republican U.S. Congressional aide. He retired in May 2011 after 28 years as a Congressional staff member. His writings, critical of politics in the United States, particularly the Republican Party, were published after his retirement and garnered widespread attention.



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Reviewed by: Sana Sapra

Republican party insider Mike Lofgren's bestseller, "The Deep State," aptly subtitled "The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government, is an engaging, well-written book that can hold the interest of a reader who has no prior knowledge on the subject. As a working-class citizen's look into the "circus being run from within the monkey's cage," it is an evocative analysis of the policies and impact of the puppet master's on Capitol Hill.

In the early chapters, the author cleanly captures the mundanity of Washington and the disillusionment of bureaucratic work that creates detachment from the 'real world' outside the Beltway. The reader is left with the understanding that the enigmatic 'Deep State', while insidious, is a product of the qualities that have arisen in human beings since time immemorial greed. What lends it its dangerous quality is the divorce it has from reality and the daily lives of ordinary working-class citizens. It is what led to the downfall of Wall Street and the housing market in 2008 and also what ensured that major bank executives and people in power went scott-free. This insulation and apathy coming from powerful people in the most powerful country in the world has had devastating effects on not only their own citizens but the rest of the world.

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Lofgren writes that the "birth of the atomic weapon was the moment of conception of the Deep State." No other government project had previously been shrouded in as much secrecy as the Manhattan project, with a complete lack of accountability for its handlers. Constitutionally, the POTUS and the actions of Congress are held accountable by the people, the voters, who can keep them in power for another term or ensure they are not elected again. This is not true for the deep state. The author describes the Deep State as an "iron cage"—"a metaphor representing the bureaucratisation of society and its relentless pressure on individual actors to conform to the ingrained expectations of the organisations they work for."

The Deep State ensures that the satellite corporations and campaign contributors are the ones with the power to keep elected officials in check, with no one to hold them accountable in turn. The inequality gap between the haves and have nots widens no matter the change in regime, and there results a vicious circle with no check on the system of the rich because the system is controlled by the rich. The Deep State has given rise to a plutocracy masquerading as the last vestiges of a democracy.

Throughout history, violence born of hubris has dogged the rise of empires. Man has only ever needed two things to wage war—the motive and the means. The United States has the ability to create both. The iron cage of satellite corporations and their subsidiaries resulted in America's positioning itself as a global leader to further their economic interests by using their expansive material power. To generate funding for their massive military while keeping the public in the dark, the government used fear as their primary weapon to keep their workings shrouded. Whether this was what their citizens wanted or not is irrelevant. As the author puts it, "Politicians do not seek to identify with the desires of the majority, except insofar as those desires happen to overlap with the preferences of those who are footing the bill."

With money running Washington and hidden agendas and secret agencies becoming part of life post-the Manhattan project, the position of head of state was shifted towards a ceremonial one. Even the words of those campaigning to be president are not their own, instead tailored to suit their financiers. The author writes that companies like Goldman Sachs and KKR were funding Hilary Clinton's candidacy at a rate of $20,000 per speech. Politicians are reduced to commodities, with corporations serving as brands to back them up. The'rebranding' of a politician works the same way as the revamping of an old car or laptop—ppeople look at you differently only because of the information they've been fed. This can be seen even in the current election scenario in America, with people clamouring to vote for Trump not because he was "nearly ssassinated," b but because "he took a bullet for the ountry." Making politicians accessible and bringing them to the masses is what advertising executives do, which only stands to highlight the dissonance most people from the Beltway have towards the desires of the public.

The author describes Washington as a bubble. The plutocracy has "disconnected itself from the civic life of the nation and from concern about its well-being." Post-9/11, the emphasis of the government on homeland security increased, and the military began to be used liberally by a civilian leadership that used the armed forces as a "first rather than last resort on dubious matters of national security." General Smedley Butler describes his time in the military as "I spent…most of my time as a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and the bankers. I helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914... Looking back on it, I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents."

The government being little more than a glorified, legal mob with large firepower, no checks and accountability, and the leader having to cater to the secret service who feeds him information is a direct result of the Deep State. The reason for stagnation in the government, for little change in policy areas that matter, is because of the strings being pulled by corporations in search of profit, heavily divorced from the needs of the general populace. The author states that due to the Deep State's entrenchment in surveillance, firepower, and money, along with leaders who double down on failed policies, the system is impervious to change.

The invasion of privacy post-the dotcom burst and the heavy surveillance that followed is a glimpse into the dystopian future we are headed towards—or might already be living in. George Orwell's 1984 has become a reality, and we can expect no help from the policymakers supposed to protect us, for they are also "captives" of the corporations that feed them information collected from civilians. The root of the Deep State is the capitalistic system and the unrestrained freedom given to the 1% of the USA. With both Democrat and Republican parties entrenched in the Deep State, it is difficult to bring about any real change. It is likely that every presidential term will have a president who is an iteration of their predecessor, with not much room for actual progress in public welfare unless it matches the aims of the Deep State.

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