



Rethinking America

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US: Toward Government by the Military?

Is the role of the Pentagon and its former brass under Trump similar to the former KGB in post-Soviet Russia?

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By [Alexei Bayer](#), August 29, 2017



Donald Trump has surrounded himself with generals. He likes their uniforms, medals and stars, as well as the fact that they honor him as Commander-in-Chief.

The unelected “troika” of generals — Secretary of Defense Jim “Mad Dog” Mattis, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Chief of Staff John Kelly — have taken control of U.S. policy-making.

True to form, the military brass have just won the day yet again. They have convinced Trump to adopt their recommendations on Afghanistan, to continue America’s aimless 16-Year War.

There has been a kind of inevitability in the way the Pentagon got into the driver seat. The President is inexperienced and an intellectual lightweight. The United States Congress, meanwhile, is led by a Republican Party whose governing skills have atrophied after eight years of practising nothing but obstruction under Barack Obama.

The military is now the most cohesive part of the U.S. government, as well as the only one the public respects. **According to Gallup**, confidence in the military has been consistently above 70%. In contrast, business and the media score in the 20% range. Congress hovers just above single digits.

Even Trump’s liberal critics believe it’s a good thing that the generals are exercising a restraining influence on the rogue Leader of the Free World.

Good morning, military junta?

Normally, civilian chaos and growing political role of the armed services is the stuff of which Third World military coups are made. But don’t worry about an American junta.

There is a more relevant — and frightening — model: What is evolving in the United States reminds me of a subtle, insidious, quasi-constitutional power grab that took place in Russia back in 1999.

Back then, Boris Yeltsin appointed KGB colonel Vladimir Putin as his successor. Putin got duly elected and gradually placed his KGB buddies in positions of power throughout the government, while also stomping out dissent and hollowing out the nascent Russian democracy.

Now, Russia continues to hold elections, but the country is fully in the grip of former secret policemen who will remain in power long after Putin is gone.

Takeaways

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There are plenty of similarities between the old Soviet KGB and the Pentagon.

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The chasm with civilian society is widening and military families are becoming a special

caste in the US.

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The Pentagon won every battle it has been in since the Korean war nearly 70 years ago, but lost every war.

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Pentagon and Lubyanka – separated at birth?

There are plenty of similarities between the old Soviet KGB and the Pentagon. The Russian secret police was a fraternity.

Putin once admitted that there is no such thing as a former KGB officer. Once you're KGB, **you're always KGB.**

The U.S. military used to be a citizens' army, stemming from the Founding Fathers' ideal of the citizen soldier with a gun behind every kitchen door, ready to defend the country.

But after Vietnam, politicians found it expedient to abolish the draft and to build an all-volunteer, professional force. During the two ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, this force has forged close internal ties — a true frontline brotherhood that is resentful of those who don't belong to it.

While the chasm with civilian society is widening, military families are also becoming a special caste in the United States. Since women are now also serving, active-duty personnel have been intermarrying, with the next generation **choosing a military career as well.**

Falling short

For all the fear that ordinary Soviets felt for their KGB, and respect that Americans have for their men and women in uniform, both the KGB and the U.S. armed services have done a lousy job.

True, the KGB was good at spying at home and abroad, ferreting out and arresting dissidents and occasionally assassinating political opponents.

But the KGB managed to completely miss the fall of communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which it had been created to safeguard. (It quickly found a new footing in Russia).

Similarly, the Pentagon won every battle it has been in since the Korean war nearly 70 years ago, but lost every war.

Advice that its top brass proffered to every president from Lyndon Johnson to Barack Obama has led to tactical victories, but never brought Washington closer to extricating itself from open-ended military conflicts. Certainly, victories have been elusive.

When the Soviet Union collapsed, and the Russian state became weakened, the KGB was the only organization strong enough to seize power. The same process is underway in the United States under the Trump Administration.

We are seeing, for example, how the military is starting to ignore Trump and his "total ban" on **transgender personnel**, and even to contradict him directly, as in a statement by the Joint Chiefs of Staff **condemning racism.**

Power corrupts

The KGB seemed to be a highly ideologically motivated, patriotic force dedicated to the advancement of communism and the Soviet Union. Once its members came to power in post-Soviet Russia, however, Putin's secret service generals proved to be interested in personal gain and in power to safeguard their ill-gotten wealth.

Russia has become a kleptocracy with no future; the kleptocrats know that and keep their assets and their families outside their supposedly beloved country.

There is no reason to think that American generals, if they were to secure power in Washington, will act differently, despite their apparent commitment to American

democracy, the Constitution and patriotism.

The present “troika” around Trump — Secretary of Defense Jim “Mad Dog” Mattis, National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster and Chief of Staff John Kelly — are universally acclaimed as top-notch generals and the best and most honorable men America’s warrior culture has produced.

They are happy to serve in an administration that divides the nation and whose members, starting with their Commander-in-Chief himself, stuff their own pockets.

General Mike Flynn was also considered to be a model soldier. But when push came to shove, he has been revealed as greedy, corrupt and, quite possibly, guilty of betraying the country.

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Jason Brown · Founder at Journalism Agenda 2025

"..the Pentagon won every battle it has been in since the Korean war nearly 70 years ago, but lost every war."

Great piece, but I'm not really sure 'winning' any war is the main target of a military industrial complex enjoying undue influence. It's to keep said complex going as a perpetual profit machine, regardless of who's in power.

Oh, reading it again, you've said exactly that, about our army bureaucrats:

"They are happy to serve in an administration that divides the nation and whose members, starting with their Commander-in-Chief himself, stuff their own pockets."

Well spotted.

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About Alexei Bayer

Alexei Bayer is the Eastern Europe Editor of The Globalist. [United States]

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