



Jeremy Scahill on the Military Industrial Complex, US-Airbase in Ramstein & Anti-War Movements

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Introduction Text:

Jeremy Scahill is one of the three founding editors of *The Intercept*. He is an investigative reporter, war correspondent, and author of the international bestselling books *Dirty Wars: The World Is a Battlefield* and *Blackwater: The Rise of the World's Most Powerful Mercenary Army*. He has reported from Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Yemen, Nigeria, the former Yugoslavia, and elsewhere across the globe. Scahill has served as the national security correspondent for *The Nation* and *Democracy Now!*.

Scahill's work has sparked several congressional investigations and won some of journalism's highest honors. He was twice awarded the prestigious George Polk Award, in 1998 for foreign reporting and in 2008 for *Blackwater*. Scahill is a producer and writer of the award-winning film *Dirty Wars*, which premiered at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival and was nominated for an Academy Award.

Zain Raza (ZR)

Jeremy Scahill, thank you so much for joining us today.

Jeremy Scahill (JS)

It's great to be with you guys.

ZR

So I want to start off with the farewell address from President Eisenhower. In his last speech he talked about something called the military-industrial complex. I want to quote a passage from that speech: "In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist. We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes." In Germany,

when U.S. foreign policies are analyzed or reported, there is little to no mention of the military-industrial complex. Can you briefly tell us what the military-industrial complex is, its history and what scale and scope it possesses today?

JS

Well, I mean first of all, you have to understand that when Eisenhower was President was right as what is known historically as the Cold War was just gearing up, and the United States had never had the scope of military power that it ended up with because of World War II. What happened at that time in the U.S., in the late 1930s, early 1940s and then on through the present, is that the U.S. political system ended up becoming intertwined with for-profit war making.

What do I mean by that? What I mean is that the U.S. government implemented a system where huge corporations could have monopolies on very devastating weapon systems. Their biggest client would be the United States. And what Eisenhower was talking about was that when you empower these corporations – today Lockheed Martin for instance could go to war against almost any nation in the world, and it's a private corporation – When those corporations are having their profits linked not to a breakout of peace but to a spreading of war, it's going to fundamentally shift what is the most sacred duty of a nation state, through the mainstream lens, which is the decision to go to war.

And in turn, what ended up happening was that these very large war corporations began funding the political campaigns of both the Democratic and Republican parties to the point where the politicians in Washington almost down to the last one are all sponsored by corporate interest in what is effectively a legalized form of bribery and corruption in the United States. So we now have a situation where drone warfare is very pervasive, where drones are getting smaller, where we're talking about robotic warfare, where the U.S. does not need to subject its troops to the kinds of risks it did in previous wars because you can wage war remotely through both drones but also through various complex missile systems, cruise missile systems. And so the corporations have nothing to gain from diplomatic resolutions to any crises and everything to gain from presenting the next big toy of death that the United States absolutely must have to kill whoever the new bad guy is in the never-ending war that now has been embraced by both Democrats and Republicans in the United States.

ZR

In the European political system, politicians frequently move in and out of the banking system. Former president of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso for example, recently joined Goldman Sachs. Mario Draghi, the current head of the European Central Bank, is also part of Goldman Sachs. Is this revolving door behavior also prevalent in the military-industrial complex, and what dangers does it pose to the world generally?

JS

Prevalent? That is exactly how the United States' political system works. I mean, I wouldn't even say there is a revolving door, it's more like a little footbridge where they go from government to the private sector and then back again. You know, you look at Donald Trump's cabinet: The first 17 people that he appointed to his cabinet have more combined wealth than

43% of all Americans' wealth combined. And he has generals who have worked on behalf of foreign governments, of major corporations. The Secretary of State is going to be the former head of Exxon, who himself is a petrol criminal, in the sense that he has helped to wage and conduct wars for natural resources across the globe. Every administration, whether it's the Democrats or Republicans... when the other team is in power, they put their people in the corporate sector or in what are called 'think tanks', or as Naomi Klein says 'the people paid to think by the makers of tanks'. And so you have in both Democratic and Republican administrations an incredible amount of corruption.

But the one thing that I would point out is that Trump's military figures that he has – Gen. James Mattis, who is going to be the Secretary of Defense – you are supposed to be out of the military for 7 years before you can serve in a civilian capacity in the United States. And the reason for that is so that we preserve the civilian nature of our government. But Mattis and Gen. Mike Flynn who is the National Security Adviser and Gen. John Kelly who is a xenophobe that is going to be the Homeland Security Secretary and Adm. Rogers who is going to be the Director of National Intelligence... All of these people, if we are looking at this in the context of Russia or another country we would be saying it looks like a bit of a putsch against democracy because of the "elected" leader, even though he lost by 3 million votes, Donald Trump, is bringing in all of these military figures who are going to then run the military.

So it really undermines the notion of civilian oversight. And I bring that up because the revolving door as you call it or the footbridge as I refer to it is but one aspect of the bipartisan nature of legalized corruption that in other countries exists in a more raw form and so it is easier to say it is corruption. The United States is the same as those Nigeria scams, you know, the 'just give me your bank account, I am the late grandson of Sani Abacha and I'll deposit the money for you'? Ok, that's an obscene overt form of corruption and trying to take advantage of people. The United States just makes laws that make it seem as though 'Oh, this is a good idea' rather than just rank corruption. Instead of shipping suitcases of cash across a remote border somewhere, the United States calls it campaign contributions.

I know in Europe, NASCAR is not that popular but it is very popular in United States, the car racing, and of course Donald Trump loves NASCAR because it is sort of considered like 'America!', but the NASCAR drivers all wear like the sponsorship on their uniforms from the different companies that sponsor them, and I really think that in our Congress in the United States every member of Congress should have to wear the logos of every company that paid for them to get to Washington.

ZR

Since you mentioned Trump, let's focus on his foreign policy picks. What do you think his cabinet picks mean for the stance towards Russia, Iran and Africa, and what effects can this have on Europe? Should we be concerned here?

JS

Well, first of all, let me just address this Russia situation head-on. I do think that there are serious questions about what Trump's relationship with Russia may be. Gen. Mike Flynn repeatedly calling the Russian ambassador of the U.S., including on the day that Obama imposed these sanctions, that's highly unusual in U.S. politics. So there are questions there that need to

be asked and I think that a much more thorough forensic investigation needs to be done about the way that John Podesta was phished and the DNC had their emails accessed, but what's happened in the U.S. is that the democratic elite are basically engaged in a modern form of pseudo-McCarthyism by tarring anyone who questions the unverified and in some cases unverifiable assertions of the CIA and the FBI that you somehow are a stooge for Vladimir Putin. And that's happened to me, that's happened to Glenn Greenwald. What we are saying is what we said at the time of the Iraq war which is: Show us the money. Show us the evidence that indicates that there was state sponsorship of these hacks. There is a lot of circumstantial evidence. I wouldn't be shocked if Russia did seek to influence U.S. political outcomes. United States has a PhD in overthrowing governments around the world. Of course Russia is doing that, of course Israel is doing that, of course Germany is doing that. All nations are interfering in other nations' affairs in this way. But somehow Russia has been placed in this special category by the flailing failed Democratic party as a way to cover up the fact that they ran the queen of the elite who is a corporatist empire politician, they ignore working class people in the U.S. because they thought they were going to cruise to victory because Trump is such a fucking dingbat - and they were wrong. And they were wrong and they ran a candidate who embodies everything that people suffering economically in this country hate about American politicians. So the Russia thing is a red herring. Did Vladimir Putin influence the election? Maybe. But did he influence it more than Hillary Clinton's terrible campaign? Absolutely not.

ZR

Let's talk specifically about Germany's role in the war on terror. At the end of 2015 you released the Drone Papers which you also call The Assassination Complex. Could you talk about the drone papers and specifically Germany's role in it?

JS

Well, you know, there was an event I spoke at in Berlin recently where there was a representative of the German Foreign Office there and it was a debate with an excellent heroic human rights lawyer, Wolfgang Kaleck, who's a friend and also one of the great lawyers who has pursued Donald Rumsfeld in an attempt to hold him criminally responsible for torture and other abuses. But the Foreign Office had agreed to do this if he was not directly asked by the panelist about the role of Ramstein air force base or Germany in the so-called War on Terror, but I wasn't bound by that agreement, so I got up in the audience, just watching like everyone else, my panel had finished, and I went to town on this guy and he basically said, and you can find this, it's online, that the reason that we are allowing the U.S. to use facilities within Germany is because the U.S. is a powerful country and we can't say No to them. That's an astonishing admission and really raises questions about how the German foreign office views the sovereignty of its own country on these matters. But Germany is not just sort of like a passive victim here that 'Oh, the big bad United States is sneaking around using our backyard', no, Germany knows damn well what goes on at Ramstein air force base, they know that it's where the key uplinks are that are used for the overwhelming majority of drone strikes in the world, and they're fine with it. They're absolutely fine with it. If they weren't they would do something about it. German courts, German political figures are all complicit in almost every drone strike, including those that have killed children, civilians, potentially German citizens. Germany is fully complicit in this. The other thing is that at Stuttgart you have a U.S. Africa Command which is actively plotting assassinations and has carried out assassinations throughout East Africa using Germany as a place where they are plotting, planning, orchestrating, and

coordinating lethal operations. We also know that the German government is being sued because it appears as though Germany has on a number of occasions provided intelligence to the United States on German citizens or German residents so that the U.S. can kill them in drone strikes. I think those are extremely important cases and Germany is trying to essentially escape its own culpability in this even on a good day where they'll say 'Oh, we can't really control what the Americans do' - bullshit. Germany is its own country; if it wanted to it could shut this down, it won't do it, and the question is: Why? And the best answer I've heard is 'Because America is powerful and we do what they tell us'. Well, that's really pathetic, German government.

ZR

So in Germany a number of anti-war protests and demonstrations take place annually. On Feb 17th for example, there is a huge demonstration planned against the so-called Security Conference and in September there is a huge demonstration taking place in Ramstein. What can you tell us that these activists can learn from past anti-war movements and do you have a message for them personally?

JS

Well, one of the things I think has been devastating in the United States... Since 1999 when you had the anti-corporate global uprising converge in the city of Seattle and you had the so-called Battle in Seattle, that was the global north waking up and embracing movements that had been on fire in the global south for a very long time, in India, in Korea, throughout Central and Latin America, and what happened, it was an energizing moment on the U.S. Left, because it was joining the rest of the world's struggles of resistance and doing it in a humble way not saying 'We're the Americans, we know everything' which tends to be the perspective of a lot of the American leftists, that they are the most important leftists in the world, and of course that's not true. But what ended up happening was that in 2004 the large anti-war coalitions got folded into the operations of the Democratic Party. The largest coalition of anti-war activists in the U.S., United for Peace and Justice, basically ended up becoming surrogates for the campaign - also a terrible campaign - of John Kerry. Then in 2008, all of the energy was sucked out of the room because Mr. Transformative Nobel Prize Winner Constitutional Lawyer came around and that basically destroyed the entire anti-war movement. So what I would say is that in Germany and in Europe, I think there are very strong left movements, labor-organized movements, but also have taken a pummeling in recent years. And I think that all of us, whether we're in the U.S. or in Europe or elsewhere, need to sort of take a humility pill and realize that just being glued to our computers or watching live streams or tweeting or being on Facebook is not going to change anything. Fundamentally, what changes things is when people actually get away from their computer and into the streets. So the only - not that I'm some expert in a position to give sage advice, but from my 25, 30 years of being around these movements - I would say that never seed your conscience to a political figure no matter how much you agree with their political message, because politicians of all stripes end up playing a game that ultimately hurts ordinary people. That leads to war crimes. That leads to normalizing fascists like Donald Trump. Shame on Hillary Clinton for going to that inauguration by the way.

ZR:

Ok, so the last question comes from Nina from Munich: Why does the U.S. still support the Saudi government?

Well, I mean first of all, the United States supports many repressive governments that murder their own people, that chop heads off, in the case of Saudi-Arabia in the streets. I mean if Saudi-Arabia had olive oil instead of petrol or black gold, I don't think the U.S. would care at all about Saudi-Arabia and they would probably be denouncing their human rights abuses and deploying some anti-power or babble some bullshit about the U.S. stands against what the Saudis are doing. But the reality is that the Saudis play three primary functions for U.S. interests: One, the Saudis represent America's strongest gateway into manipulation of OPEC and oil pricing. Two, the Saudis give preferential treatment to U.S. oil corporations. And three, the Saudis have emerged as a very effective proxy force for the U.S. in countries like Yemen for instance where the Saudis are mercilessly, savagely murdering people on a mass scale for nothing. And they're doing it with U.S. and European-supplied munitions and the U.S. is doing the air-refueling for the Saudis. Every single civilian that dies in Yemen, U.S. has blood on its hands. Because they are using the Saudis to do something that they know is shameful and that they can portrait as sort of 'Well, this is an internal conflict on the Arabian peninsula'. So, it's petro dollars, it's political manipulation within OPEC and it's the fact that the Saudis are a very useful proxy for the U.S., not just in Yemen but also in the conflicts in Syria and to a lesser extent Libya.

ZR

Jeremy Scahill, co-founder of The Intercept, thank you for joining us today.

JS

Thank you. Let's get a woman on the panel next time.

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