

The Russia-Did-It Certitude Challenged

Many mainstream news outlets confessed to their gullibility over the Iraq-WMD claims, but have fallen into another groupthink over Russia-gate, as Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein heard from ex-U.K. Ambassador Craig Murray.

By Randy Credico and Dennis J Bernstein

Despite the certitude of the U.S. Congress and the corporate press, not everyone believes that the Russians “hacked” the Clinton campaign and handed Donald Trump his stunning victory. Among those saying that the Russians did not do it is the former whistleblowing British ambassador to Uzbekistan, Craig Murray, who collaborates with WikiLeaks, which published the Democratic emails last year.

“I know who leaked them,” Murray said recently. “I’ve met the person who leaked them, and they are certainly not Russian and it’s an insider. It’s a leak, not a hack; the two are different things.”

Ambassador Murray, a friend and close associate of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, was also an early opponent of the the U.S.-British-led war against Iraq, and an early whistleblower on the wide-ranging program of torture and rendition promoted by U.S. President George W. Bush and condoned by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was recently absolved by a British court – on a technicality – of being criminally liable for the US torture program.

These days, Ambassador Murray is an author, broadcaster and human rights activist. He served as British Ambassador to Uzbekistan from August 2002 to October 2004 and Rector of the University of Dundee from 2007 to 2010.

Dennis Bernstein: My first question, Mr. Ambassador, is whether you are concerned with this Russia-gate frenzy and how it might end up leading us into a direct confrontation with Russia, and thus open the door to World War III?

Craig Murray: Well, there is always that danger when a confrontation exists between nuclear armed powers. The whole anti-Russia propaganda campaign that is going on at the moment is quite extraordinary because there is no factual basis behind it. But it is certainly a continuation of the anti-Russia propaganda that has dominated political discourse in the United States for several years now.

Of course, this is very much in the interests of the armaments industry. We have to remember that there are those who benefit enormously from extra spending on armaments and the armed forces. These people are the ones pushing the agenda.

DB: We’ve been doing sort of a poll of our guests, asking them whether they

consider what happened in the United States as a leak or a hack.

CM: Well, through my association with WikiLeaks, I know for sure that it was a leak and not a hack. As Bill Binney, former technical director of the NSA, has pointed out, were it actually a hack the NSA would be able to pinpoint it. In fact, there is no such evidence. This is not something WikiLeaks got from a foreign state or from hackers. No, there is no doubt at all that this was an internal leak. Besides which, we are talking about two separate things in the DNC emails and the Podesta emails, so it would be wrong to presume that there is only one leaker.

Randy Credico: Is this just an artifice to cover up the real motivation with regards to Russia, which is to break the country into small states and to prevent them from getting involved in the world oil supply?

CM: I am not sure they actually want to break up Russia. They rather like having a reasonably strong Russia because it gives them an excuse to invest large amounts of money in armaments, which are very profitable. The militarist forces on both sides like to play up the strength of the other and portray the other as evil. That is primarily what we have going on here.

Recently, Putin seems to be the master of the diplomatic game. And we should not forget that all of these people are part of the global one percent. The way they invest their money and where they live and how they socialize makes them all very much part of the same club in an interconnected world. So we should not be too distracted by the smoke and mirrors that the global elite put up. While these are very dangerous games to be playing, the people playing them have some very cozy relationships behind the scenes.

RC: Tell us about your relationship with Julian Assange and the conditions he is now living under.

CM: Well, I have known Julian Assange for several years now. Like Julian, I was myself a whistleblower. I left the British foreign service in order to expose torture and extraordinary rendition related to the war in Iraq. We have a club of whistleblowers, if you like, of which Daniel Ellsberg is a kind of patron. And obviously WikiLeaks, which is the best publisher for whistleblowers, is very important to us.

I have been appalled by the treatment of Julian and the evidently nonsensical allegations made against him in Sweden. And I am saddened by the continued persecution of WikiLeaks by the United States. Of course, a lot of people are very sore that the dreadful American war crimes were exposed by the leaks believed to be perpetrated by Chelsea Manning. A lot of people don't like the

light that WikiLeaks shines on the dark places of government. But in the land which purportedly upholds freedom of speech as a great virtue, it is a dreadful shame to see the persecution of a publisher in this way.

Then, of course, we see the completely ridiculous nature of this whole Russia-gate affair. Really it was just a kind of propaganda excuse for Hillary Clinton's appalling election campaign. All this makes unlikely allies who have ganged up on Julian Assange from the establishment side of both major parties in the United States.

RC: In the wake of the recent UK elections what, if anything, has changed for Julian Assange?

CM: Nothing good at the moment. We still have the conservative party in power and now they are in alliance with the Democratic Unionist Party, who are the most retrograde, religiously motivated party here and who tilt the government even more to the right than it was before. In the medium to longer term, based on the performance by Jeremy Corbin's Labor Party, which comes as a breath of fresh air in British politics, we may well see a reversal of the current situation.

DB: One of the issues that WikiLeaks confronts head on is the endless wars that the United States has been waging, in Iraq in particular. Tony Blair was being investigated for lying us into the Iraq War but [on July 31] he was absolved of all charges.

CM: Interestingly, what the UK high court said in the recent judgment was that there is no crime of aggression under British domestic law. They claimed that this international crime has never entered into British domestic law by an act of parliament and can therefore not be enforced in the UK.

So it was a very technical acquittal. They are not saying that Blair is innocent, they are saying that legislation has never been enacted making that international war crime a domestic crime in Britain. This is quite extraordinary in many ways. The United Kingdom was one of the three countries that constituted the Nuremberg Tribunal, where the crime of aggression was the main charge.

So for the high court to rule that the United Kingdom accepts the existence of the crime of aggression and can prosecute it internationally but does not accept that it applies domestically is illogical and a case of special pleading. The high court judges are just ganging together to protect Tony Blair and making asses of themselves with this very strange ruling.

DB: Tony Blair has played a role in deciding who will control the massive oil resources in the Middle East and in other places you are familiar with. Do you

want to talk about what he has been up to?

CM: Since leaving office, he has been primarily concerned with making money for himself, on a very large scale. He is now worth hundreds of millions. It is fairly obvious that the actions he took while in office with regards to Iraq, with regards to Libya, were all undertaken to promote the interests of British and other Western oil companies and mercenary companies.

He famously worked to block the prosecution of British Aerospace for paying billions of dollars in bribes to Saudi princes to gain arms contracts, on the grounds that that would be against national security because it would damage our alliance with Saudi Arabia. That was one instance where Blair, while prime minister, intervened directly to aid the armaments industry and prevent an anti-corruption prosecution.

Since he left office, he has been cashing in on all of this. He is completely shameless. He is a consultant to the president of Kazakhstan, for example, a very nasty dictatorship. One thing that has become public through a leak is that he was advising the government of Kazakhstan on how to handle public relations after Kazakh soldiers massacred coal miners for going on strike. Here's Blair, who used to represent a coal mining district, advising on how to do a good PR cover-up of the massacre of coal miners.

The man is completely unprincipled. He is just out to get whatever money he can. I wouldn't say he has much power nowadays. He rather prostitutes himself to the wealthy, particularly those from countries with dubious human rights records who view it as helpful to cash in on his global image.

RC: We know about the War Logs and what they exposed in Afghanistan. Can you talk about what happened in Uzbekistan?

CM: It is very different to know about it intellectually and to come face-to-face with it. Within a month of first arriving in Uzbekistan, we got detailed photos of a guy who had been literally boiled alive at one of the big prison camps. He had been alive when placed in the boiling liquid. That sort of thing makes you realize what it really means when people talk of torture.

There is no doubt that the CIA were actually colluding in such torture and to a large extent financing it. Hundreds of millions of American taxpayer dollars were put into the Uzbek security services and the CIA was getting their so-called intelligence from those torture sessions.

We also discovered that the CIA was flying people into Uzbekistan under the extraordinary rendition program. In pretty much every case, they were never seen again. At that time, I assumed that all the people being flown in to be tortured

were Uzbeks who had been captured abroad and flown back to their own country. I didn't realize that the Americans were flying in other nationals to be tortured by the Uzbek security services.

RC: What were they trying to elicit from these people who were being tortured?

CM: In virtually every case, they were making them confess to membership in Al Qaeda and to the existence of widespread terror plots to attack Western countries. I am ninety-nine percent certain that every one of these stories was untrue. Often I could show the information was wrong.

But the object was to exaggerate the threat posed by Al Qaeda because that was the justification for our foreign policy, for all our invasions, and for all the restrictions on civil liberties at home. The security services required a strong terrorist threat in order to justify their actions. By sending people to be tortured, they were manufacturing the false existence of a terrorist threat.

RC: What happened when you went public with this?

CM: I arrived in August and I think by December I was sending back top-secret internal telegrams protesting this, which were bound to get me sacked. In some ways, I consider myself something of a fraud as a whistleblower. I protested internally, I did everything I could within the system to stop it. I was making the case that these actions were illegal and that we were colluding in these actions by receiving this intelligence.

I thought that if we got this before government lawyers, they would advise the government to put an end to it. What happened to me then was similar to what happened to Julian Assange. After a twenty-year unblemished career, I suddenly found that I was up on charges of trying to extort sex from visa applicants, of being an habitual alcoholic, and so on.

DB: Ambassador Murray, what would be your understanding of how high in the US government people knew about this rendition program?

CM: In the UK I am certain that it did go all the way up the chain as far as Tony Blair. I made sure my protests went that high. When I was told to shut up, I was told that this had all been authorized from the very top. In the States, I know it went as high as Donald Rumsfeld because he had signed off on torture techniques personally. The lawyers who drafted documents on what was permissible

in terms of torture certainly passed those by



DB: Was what happened in the Ukraine a case of Russian aggression or a US soft coup?

CM: I am actually quite critical of both parties. There is no doubt that the United States was interfering very strongly in Ukrainian politics. On the other hand, I also think that the Russians supported levels of violence that were unnecessary. I get very criticized by the left. The left has become very pro-Putin, as a reaction I suppose to the lies of the right. But it is overcompensation to paint Putin as a saint. So the US was undoubtedly engaged in attempts at a coup, something it has been doing for decades.

RC: Ambassador, you were involved in peace negotiations in Sierra Leone back in 1998. At the time you ran across someone named Spicer who was an arms merchant and ran mercenary companies and who later went to Iraq. Could you just encapsulate that period in a few minutes?

CM: Spicer, together with a guy called Tony Buckingham, was initially in charge of a company which was called Executive Outcomes, made up of former British special forces personnel who sold themselves to oil companies in Angola and other oil-rich African states in order to physically take control of oil resources during times of civil war. They perpetrated an awful lot of atrocities, including machine gunning villagers from helicopters.

After Executive Outcomes, they moved on to a company called Sandline which was involved in a very crooked deal to take control of the diamond resources of Sierra Leone. To me, involved in the peace negotiations there, it was sickening to witness the desire of Western companies and Western governments to get out of it access to Sierra Leone's diamond and titanium resources.

Then of course the people at Executive Outcomes and Sandline went on to really strike the jackpot in Iraq, where they ran a private mercenary company called Agis, which worked for both the British and United States governments and

employed tens of thousands of mercenaries. The people responsible for it made billions of dollars from the privatization of killing. All of this is quite startling and far too little known.

DB: Getting back to where we started, what do you see as the importance of Julian Assange in the context of what is called mainstream journalism?

CM: Julian Assange has been a central figure in breaking the monopoly on what we are allowed to know. People now increasingly distrust the mainstream media and get their information from places where you have direct access to source documentation rather than read the opinion of some journalist on it. I think that is very important. I think other whistleblowers have made a mistake by going through the mainstream media, who have then acted as gatekeepers on what we find out through those leaks. The Panama Papers were a great example of that kind of lost opportunity.

Julian is really the figurehead for freedom of information and a figurehead for governments to trounce. He is an enormously intelligent and articulate individual who has a tremendous contribution to make to international debate, aside from the material that he publishes. Obviously, he would be able to fulfill that role to a much greater degree if he were free.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
