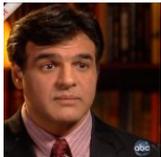


# The Case for Stripping Former Officials of their Security Clearances

COMMENTARY: Former CIA agent John Kiriakou argues that no former intelligence official should be allowed to keep their security clearances when they leave government, especially if they work in the media.

**By John Kiriakou**

*Special to Consortium News*



Libertarian senator Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, said on Monday that in a personal meeting with President Donald Trump, he urged the president to revoke the security clearances of a half dozen former Obama-era intelligence officials, including former CIA director John Brennan, former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, and former National Security Advisor Susan Rice. I couldn't agree more with Paul's position, not specifically regarding these three people, but for any former intelligence official. No former intelligence official should keep a security clearance, especially if he or she transitions to the media or to a corporate board.

The controversy specifically over Brennan's clearance has been bubbling along for more than a year. He has been one of Trump's most vocal and harshest critics. Last week he went so far as to accuse Trump of having committed "treason" during his meeting in Helsinki, Finland with Russian president Vladimir Putin. Brennan said in a tweet, "Donald Trump's press conference performance in Helsinki rises to & exceeds the threshold of 'high crimes and misdemeanors.'" It was nothing short of treasonous. Not only were Trump's comments imbecilic, he is wholly in the pocket of Putin. Republican patriots: Where are you???" The outburst was in response to Trump's unwillingness to accept the Intelligence Community position that Putin and the Russians interfered in the 2016 presidential election.

Other intelligence professionals weighed in negatively on Trump's Helsinki performance, including Republicans like former Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and former CIA director Mike Hayden.

Why are these people saying anything at all? And why do they have active Top Secret security clearances if they have no governmental positions? The first question is easier to answer than the second. Before answering, though, I want to say that I don't think this issue is specific to Donald Trump. Former officials of every administration criticize those who have replaced them. That's the way Washington works. It's a way for those former officials to remain

relevant. Donald Trump happens to be an easy target. His actions are so wildly unpredictable—and frequently so disingenuous on the surface of things—that he proves wrong the oft-quoted observation by the late Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser: “The genius of you Americans is that you never make clear-cut stupid moves. You only make complicated stupid moves, which make the rest of us wonder at the possibility that we might be missing something.”

## **Cashing In**

I’ve known John Brennan for 30 years. He was my boss in the CIA’s Directorate of Intelligence decades ago. John was hard to get along with. His superiors generally didn’t like him. He was once fired from a job at the CIA. He’s not particularly bright. And then he found a patron in former CIA director George Tenet, who saved his career. Brennan has had his run. He succeeded beyond his wildest dreams. He’s been CIA Director, deputy National Security Advisor, director of the Transnational Terrorism Information Center, and deputy Executive Director of the CIA. That’s pretty heady stuff for a kid from Bergen, New Jersey.

He also has very low self-esteem from those early days at the CIA. Almost everybody else had more degrees, spoke more languages, and went to better schools. Until Tenet, Brennan never had a political rabbi and was stuck at the GS-15 (journeyman) level for years. Now, all these years later, he again doesn’t have anyone to help his career. Barack Obama isn’t president anymore. And Brennan desperately wants to be Secretary of Defense. He says it to anybody willing to listen. *That* is what’s supposed to be his legacy, at least in his mind.

Besides legacy, Brennan and the others have cashed in on their government service. They’ve all become rich by sitting on corporate boards. Brennan is on the board of directors of a company called SecureAuth + CORE Security. He also serves on the board of The Analysis Corporation, which he helped found before joining the Obama Administration. Finally, and most importantly, Brennan is now the official talking head and “Intelligence Consultant” for NBC News and MSNBC.

To me, this is the point that is the most obviously wrong. How is it that former officials who now have no role in government are able to keep their active security clearances? This has abuse written all over it. First, these officials run the risk of exposing classified information in a television interview, either inadvertently or not. Second, and more cynically, what is to keep them from propagandizing the American people by simply spouting the CIA line or allowing the CIA to use them to put out disinformation? What’s to keep them from propagandizing the American people by selectively leaking information known only to the intelligence agencies and Congress? Or to release information passed to

them by the FBI?

No former intelligence officials should have a security clearance. There's no purpose for it other than propaganda and personal enrichment. And if Brennan or Hayden or Clapper or any other former intelligence official becomes an employee of a media company, he or she should not have a security clearance. Period. Donald Trump ought to act right now.

**John Kiriakou is a former CIA counterterrorism officer and a former senior investigator with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. John became the sixth whistleblower indicted by the Obama administration under the Espionage Act – a law designed to punish spies. He served 23 months in prison as a result of his attempts to oppose the Bush administration's torture program.**

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