

Virginia State Senator in Rare Support by Politician for Assange

Julian Assange's lawyers fear his extradition to the U.S. where they believe a sealed indictment in Virginia is awaiting him. In a rare move by a U.S. politician, a state senator in Virginia has come out in support of Assange.

By State Senator Richard Black



As a military officer, I was trained to strictly observe security protocols. So when I first heard of WikiLeaks and Julian Assange, I was instinctively critical. But upon reading his released documents, I saw how Julian gave people accurate insights into the inner workings of their own government.

Government “of the People” cannot flourish beneath a suffocating cloak of secrecy. And secrecy is often aimed, not at protecting us from enemies abroad, but at deceiving us about the dark machinations of our own government. The most consequential secrets are those used to conceal steps taken to establish predicates for future wars—unwarranted conflicts that seem to roll off an endless assembly line. No-fly zones, bombings, sanctions, false flags, blockades, mercenaries, bloodthirsty terrorists have all become stock in trade. Sanctions destabilize our targets through hunger and suffering. We terrorize and blow body parts into the streets like calling cards. Regime change is the end game; coups and assassinations are fair play.

Before Assange, those who “broke the code” and detected the Deep State’s patterns of misbehavior were labeled “conspiracy theorists” or worse. But with the advent of WikiLeaks, original, unchallenged source documents have proven our arguments, and revealed the truth to citizens.

Donald Trump’s election sent violent shock waves through the Deep State. People had been warned they could not elect this person—but they had ignored the instructions. That was not supposed to happen—and could not be permitted to happen again. The People demonstrated that the mainstream media had lost its tight grip on the national conversation. National intelligence was being revealed and shared. Generations of subtle censorship had folded under an onslaught of uncensored communications among families, friends, and interest groups. Social media, a new and frightening paradigm, challenged the elite’s grip on the levers of power. After Trump, restoring barriers to free speech and communications became a global imperative.

Today, we see intense, coordinated efforts to reimpose effective information

control in America and globally. Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube, PayPal and other high-tech titans rush to hire censors and adopt restrictive policies that block controversial voices from reaching global audiences. Big Brother is back in town.

Julian Assange and WikiLeaks are among the censors' prized targets. They have disrupted Big Media censorship. Assassinating Assange is not out of the question. He is that important.

I realize that Julian Assange is controversial, but I'd be pleased if some courageous nation granted him permanent asylum. Let him continue giving citizens an honest peek at the inner workings of their governments. That seems to be our best hope for peace.

Republican Senator Richard H. Black represents the 13th district of Virginia, encompassing parts of both Loudoun and Prince Williams Counties in northern Virginia.

In Shielding US from Legal Obligations, Kavanaugh Conflates International Law with Foreign Laws

Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh has nothing but contempt for international law. But he has shown uncritical deference to executive power, particularly in the so-called war on terror cases, argues Marjorie Cohn.

By Marjorie Cohn



The two primary sources of international law are treaties, and what's known as "customary international law." Ratified treaties are part of domestic U.S. law under the supremacy clause of the Constitution, which says treaties "shall be the supreme law of the land."

Furthermore, it has long been established that customary international law, which arises from the consistent and general practice of nations, is also part of U.S. law.

Although he professes to interpret the Constitution as written by the founders, Kavanaugh has apparently overlooked the supremacy clause and simply scorns customary international law.

Jordan Paust, international law scholar and professor emeritus at University of

Houston Law Center, told me in an email, “The unanimous views of the Founders, Framers, and Supreme Court Justice opinions is that the President and all members of the Executive Branch are bound by international law.” Paust also referenced a 2016 article he wrote in the Houston Journal of International Law documenting this fact.

Kavanaugh, however, erroneously conflates *international law* with *foreign law*. The U.S. agrees to the terms of treaties it ratifies. And in most instances, the United States can opt out of a customary international law norm if the U.S. objected while the norm was being developed. Foreign law, on the other hand, is the law of other countries – such as French law, German law, etc.

In the 2016 case of *Al Bahlul v. United States*, a Guantánamo detainee argued that since “conspiracy” was not an offense under the international laws of war, he should not be tried for conspiracy before a military commission.

Kavanaugh’s concurrence in that case characterized al-Bahlul’s argument as “extraordinary” because “it would incorporate international law into the U.S. Constitution as a judicially enforceable constraint on Congress and the President.”

That would mean, Kavanaugh cynically wrote, that wartime decisions made by the president and Congress to try unlawful enemy combatants before military commissions “would be subject to the dictates of foreign nations and the international community, as embodied in international law.”

He added: “The federal courts are not roving enforcers of international law. And the federal courts are not empowered to smuggle international law into the U.S. Constitution and then wield it as a club against Congress and the President in wartime.”

Kavanaugh and the War on Terror

For 12 years, while serving as a judge on the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, Kavanaugh had the opportunity to rule on several cases stemming from the “war on terror.” In nearly all of them, he demonstrated nothing but disdain for international law and an uncritical deference to executive power.

During the Bush administration, the Supreme Court checked and balanced the executive branch in several war on terror cases. They included *Rasul v. Bush* (which established that federal courts have jurisdiction to hear Guantánamo detainees’ habeas corpus petitions); *Hamdi v. Rumsfeld* (which held that a U.S. citizen held as an enemy combatant has due process rights to contest his or her detention); and *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* (which concluded that Bush’s military commissions violated the Uniform Code of Military Justice and the Geneva

Conventions).

In 2008, the high court ruled in *Boumediene v. Bush* that Guantánamo detainees held as enemy combatants have the right to file habeas corpus petitions in U.S. federal courts to challenge their detention.

But in the wake of the *Boumediene* decision, Kavanaugh tried to neuter detainees' habeas corpus rights in cases that came before him on the Court of Appeals, such as *Omar v. McHugh* and *Uthman v. Obama*. University of Texas law professor Stephen Vladeck noted in a 2011 article that since *Boumediene* was decided, commentators "have accused the D.C. Circuit in general – and some of its judges in particular – of actively subverting [*Boumediene*] by adopting holdings and reaching results that have both the intent and the effect of vitiating the ... decision."

"Prominent among those judges is Kavanaugh," Edith Roberts wrote at [SCOTUSblog](#).

In the 2010 case of *Al-Bihani v. Obama*, Kavanaugh ruled that the Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF), under which al-Bihani was held as an enemy combatant, should not be interpreted in light of the international laws of war.

Kavanaugh wrote, "International-law norms that have not been incorporated into domestic U.S. law by the political branches are not judicially enforceable limits on the President's authority under the AUMF."

A Dangerous Presumption

Paust noted in a law review article that Kavanaugh "embraced and basically relied merely on a radical ahistorical and ultimately anti-constitutional minority viewpoint" in that statement.

Kavanaugh "prefers a radical and dangerous view that 'courts may not interfere with the President's exercise of war powers based on international-law norms that the political branches have not seen fit to enact into domestic U.S. law,'" Paust wrote.

In fact, Kavanaugh twisted the law to reach what appear to be politically motivated results. Paust opined, "Bias is strikingly evident in [Kavanaugh's] non-judicious use of the phrase 'lurking international-law.'"

"This sardonic mischaracterization of law," according to Paust, "is one that [Kavanaugh's] former colleagues in the White House (for example, [Alberto] Gonzales, [George W.] Bush, [David] Addington, and [Dick] Cheney) might have appreciated during their infamous era of serial criminality orchestrated in the White House." But, Paust added, "it is decidedly out of place in an impartial appellate chamber within the judicial system of the United States."

Another example of Kavanaugh's disrespect for international law and fondness for executive power is the 2009 case of Kiyemba v. Obama. Seventeen Uighur men found to be unlawfully detained at Guantánamo feared being returned to China in violation of the United Nations Convention Against Torture and a federal statute, given the likelihood that they would face torture upon their return. Kavanaugh took the position that courts must defer to the president's determination of whether there is a likelihood of torture upon return. Most of the Uighurs were ultimately relocated to other countries, but many remain in detention.

Kavanaugh's deference to the president goes even further. In a 2014 law review article, he wrote that the take care clause of the Constitution requires the president to enforce the law, "at least unless the President deems the law unconstitutional, in which event the President can decline to follow the statute until a final court order says otherwise." Kavanaugh would create a dangerous presumption in favor of a president who refuses to follow the law.

If confirmed to the Supreme Court, Kavanaugh will almost certainly defer to the president's wartime decisions during the perpetual war on terror. He will likely extend that deference to Donald Trump's immigration policies under the guise of "national security." And Kavanaugh's frightening theory will encourage the president to disobey any law he deems unconstitutional, including customary and treaty-based international law.

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Gaza Flotilla Ship Al Awda Violently Seized by Israelis; USS Liberty Survivor Amongst Those Captured

UPDATED: Israeli forces have violently boarded a ship, being followed by Consortium News, that was headed to Gaza bringing humanitarian aid. A survivor of the USS Liberty is now in Israeli custody.

By Joe Lauria

Special to Consortium News



Israeli soldiers in international waters boarded the *Al Awda* ship headed to Gaza to deliver relief supplies on Sunday, detaining everyone on board, including a USS *Liberty* survivor, after beating and tasing some passengers, according to an eyewitness account.

Only two of the 22 passengers on the ship have been released, with the rest being held in Givon prison in Israel, the flotilla's organizers said on Monday.

One of those released, Zohar Chamberlain Regev, an Israeli citizen, contested an Israeli Defense Force (IDF) statement that the ship had been captured "without exceptional incident."

"People on board were tasered and hit by masked IOF soldiers. We did not get our passports or belongings before we got off the boat. Do not believe reports of peaceful interception," Regev said in a statement to the organizers, the Freedom Flotilla Coalition. Regev referred to the IDF derogatorily as the Israeli Occupation Force.

She said she saw "blood on the deck of the *Al Awda* as the last participants were being dragged off the ship," according to the coalition's statement. Regev and a second Israeli passenger, Yonatan Shapira, were charged with attempting to enter Gaza and conspiracy before being released.

Consortium News reported on July 9 that Joe Meadors, a survivor of the 1967 Israeli attack on the USS *Liberty*, joined the 2018 Gaza Freedom Flotilla as the delegate from the United States. He boarded the *Al Awda* in Palermo, Sicily for the final 1,000 miles to Gaza and is now in Israeli custody. Meadors pre-recorded this video message in the event that he was captured:

Meadors was a signalman on the bridge of the USS *Liberty*, a surveillance vessel operating in international waters of the Mediterranean Sea near Gaza during the 1967 Six-Day Arab-Israeli war when it was attacked by Israeli war planes and submarines, killing 34 U.S. sailors.

Speaking of the seizure of the *Al Awda*, the flotilla organizers said: "A military attack on a civilian vessel is a violent act and a violation of international law. Taking 22 people from international waters to a country which

is not their destination constitutes an act of kidnapping, which is also unlawful under the international Convention of the Law of Sea.”

Consortium News has been following the progress of the flotilla in [two reports](#) by passenger Elizabeth Murray. Murray left the *Al Awda (The Return)* before it approached Gaza and was not onboard when it was seized by Israeli forces.

“We call on national governments, civil society and international organizations to demand that Israeli authorities immediately release our boat so that we can deliver our much-needed medical supplies on *Al Awda* and the fishing boat itself to the rightful recipients in Gaza,” the Flotilla organizers said.

“Our second boat *Freedom* will follow *Al Awda* within a day or two, and the Freedom Flotilla will continue until the blockade ends and Palestinians of Gaza regain their full freedom of movement,” they said.

Besides delivering aid, the flotilla’s aim has been to bring attention to the [illegal](#) blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza since 2007.

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of Consortium News and a former correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, *Sunday Times* of London and numerous other newspapers. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](#) .

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Ahed Tamimi and Her Mother are Freed from Jail

Ahed Tamimi and her mother were freed from prison on Sunday. Ray McGovern looks back on when he met the Tamimi family last year in their West Bank village and reflects on the spirit that drives them.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



When they left prison on Sunday Ahed Tamimi and her mother Nariman received a hard-earned heroes' welcome from Palestinians and others opposed to Israel's occupation and colonization of Palestinian lands seized in 1948 and enlarged by the Israeli army in 1967.

Ahed was 16 years old last December when an Israeli soldier shot her cousin in the face. The next day Israeli soldiers menacingly showed up at her house in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh. What would you do?

Ahed slapped one of the armed-to-the-teeth soldiers. While some Israeli politicians said she should be put away for life and others demanded a sentence of at least ten years, the Israeli occupiers sentenced her to eight months for the slap seen around the world. She spent her 17th birthday in prison. Her mother Nariman filmed the incident and was thrown in jail too, this time for incitement. (It was not the activist Nariman's first time in an Israeli prison.)

The Israeli authorities are so worried about the symbol for resistance that Ahed has become internationally that on Saturday, a day before her release, they arrested two Italian artists who had painted a large portrait of her on the separation wall near Bethlehem.

Most Americans – except for the relatively few who have spent more than a few days in Israeli-occupied territories – find it hard to understand why Palestinians like Nariman and Ahed “persist.” Most people in the U.S. are blissfully unaware of the history of Palestine and of the continuing injustices inflicted on its people today. The explanation for this lies largely in the way the U.S. mass media reports the story, almost entirely from the Israelis' point of view.

For those malnourished on Establishment media, here's a bit of history, without which it is impossible to understand the anger and the courage-against-all-odds shown by those who continue to use what they have – even their open palms – to make clear that they will never acquiesce in Israeli occupation.

How a Homeland Gets Occupied

The Israeli attack starting the Six-Day War in early June 1967 fits snugly into the category of “war of aggression” as defined by the post-WWII Nuremberg Tribunal. “Pre-emptive” attacks, when there is nothing to pre-empt, are now – post Iraq war – labeled more euphemistically as “wars of choice,” but that too fits the Nuremberg definition.

To begin to appreciate the injustices inflicted on millions of Palestinians,

whose land Israel coveted for itself, one must un-learn the legend that in attacking its neighbors in 1967 Israel was acting in self-defense. None other than then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin (1977 – 83) undermined that piece of propaganda in a speech to the U.S. National Defense University on August 8, 1982. (Apparently, even accomplished dissimulators get cocky on occasion and let the truth slip out.) Here are Begin's words:

"In June, 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that [President Gamal Abdel] Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him. ... The government decided unanimously: we will take the initiative and attack the enemy, drive him back, and thus assure the security of Israel and the future of the nation."

And now, a half-century after its successful six-day war of aggression with U.S. backing, Israel has been unlawfully colonizing the occupied territories, oppressing the Palestinians still living there, and thumbing its nose at UN Security Council Resolution 242. It was approved unanimously on Nov. 22, 1967, calling on Israel to withdraw from the lands it seized in June of that year. That was then.

And This is Now ...

In February–March 2017, I was part of a a small Veterans For Peace delegation in Palestine. One of our last visits was to a village named Nabi Saleh, where Ahed's father Bassem Tamimi, his wife Nariman, and Ahed's three siblings live when they are not in prison. Her older brother is in prison now. After two weeks of experiencing what life is like for Palestinians under Israeli occupation in the West Bank, I had a chance to ask Bassem about the nonviolent, but frontal, resistance to Israeli occupation and colonization.

"Your sons have been beaten and badly wounded and one's still in prison; your wife is in and out of prison: your brother-in-law was killed by a sniper bullet; you yourself have been tortured in prison; your house is on the list for demolition – why do you persist; why encourage such actions?" I asked.

"We have no alternative," Bassem replied matter-of-factly, "it is our land and our life. I will not tell my children or my people to acquiesce in the Israeli occupation – ever."

The following day we Veterans For Peace took part in a protest march to the separation Wall. Later, underneath the tear-gas and sheltered from the ensuing rifle fire, we watched the teens of Nabi Saleh dodge the Israeli soldiers chasing them through the village for two hours. When the Israeli soldiers, so

heavily burdened with weaponry they could hardly run, finally went back behind their Wall, the young folk emerged shouting, "We won." It was a privilege to be there to welcome them back to the Tamimi house and some relative peace and quiet.

Chris Smiley, our delegation videographer, created an excellent 38-minute documentary as part of a series on our experience in Nabi Saleh called: "One Day, One Village, One Family."

The Palestinian Spirit is Universal

Ahed "Didn't Get It From the Moon". This is the expression my Irish grandmother would use to make it clear that tribute and praise should go to the seed-sowers as well as the protagonists themselves. Other traditions use some variant of: "The apple does not fall far from the tree." Suffice it to say that, from what I was able to witness of the attitude and behavior of Ahed and her three brothers, they are clearly determined to honor the rich legacy of courage and Palestinian patriotism they inherit from Bassem and Nariman – and not only from them.

One might say that Ahed and her siblings are honor graduates of the Bassem/Nariman Folk School, just as Rosa Parks was a graduate of The Highlander Folk School. The common curriculum has to do with courageous persistence in the pursuit of justice. Moreover, our delegation was to discover that Rosa Parks is a revered figure in the Israeli Knesset – well, at least in the modest conference room allocated to Arab members.

Hanging prominently on the main wall were pictures of Rosa Parks, as well as of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. And now I can hear Ahed Tamimi's voice beneath that of Rosa Parks, who explained in 1992:

"I did not want to be mistreated ... It was just time... there was opportunity for me to take a stand to express the way I felt about being treated in that manner. I had not planned to get arrested. ... But when I had to face that decision, I didn't hesitate to do so because I felt that we had endured that too long. The more we gave in, the more we complied with that kind of treatment, the more oppressive it became."

Nonetheless, they persisted.

Welcome home, Ahed and Nariman.

Miko Peled, son of an Israeli general and critic of Israel's Palestine policy, shot this video on Sunday and sent it to McGovern.

Miko Video

Ray McGovern works with a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A former Army officer and CIA analyst, he was a member of the Veterans For Peace delegation visiting Palestine in early 2017.

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Living in a World Bereft of Privacy

As Edward Snowden confirmed beyond doubt, we live in a world where our most intimate moments can be seen by would-be extortioners and, more alarmingly, by our governments, says Annie Machon.

**By Annie Machon
in Brussels**

Special to Consortium News



A few days ago I first received a menacing email from someone calling herself Susana Peritz. She told me “she” had hacked my email, planted malware on my computer, and had then filmed me getting my jollies while watching “interesting” porn online. Her email had caught my attention because it mentioned in the subject line a very old password, attached to a very old email address I had not used for over a decade. The malware must have been planted on a defunct computer.

Putting aside the fact that I am far more concerned about GCHQ or the NSA hacking my computer (as should we all be), this did rather amuse me.

Apparently, I must pay this “Susana” \$1000 via Bitcoin or, shock, have my alleged pleasures shared with my acquaintances. And just last night I received another courteous request for cash from someone calling themselves Jillie Abdulrazak, but the price has now been inflated to \$3000.

Why am I not concerned? Well, I can safely say – hand on heart – that I have never watched online porn. But this got me thinking about how or why I could have been singled out for this mark of a blackmailer’s esteem, and that brings me on to some rather dark thoughts.

It is perfectly possible that a rare, unguarded moment of long-distance online love might have been captured (but by whom?). That would probably be over a

decade ago and would certainly have been using the old email account which was attached to the particular password at the time.

However, even those memories have been denied me – I distinctly remember that I have been too paranoid for too long and have always covered the built-in computer camera lens. Anything that could possibly have been recorded could only be audio – a saucy phone call at most. There can be no video of my younger self, alas.

I have had good reason to be paranoid. In the late 1990s I supported my former partner and fellow MI5 intelligence officer, David Shalyer, in his whistleblower exploits to expose the crimes and incompetence of the UK spy agencies at the time. This resulted in us literally going on the run across Europe, living in hiding for a year in *la France profonde*, and another two years in exile in Paris before he voluntarily returned to the UK in 2000 to face the music and inevitably, under the terms of the UK' draconian 1989 Official Secrets Act, being sent to prison for exposing the crimes of British spies.

From those years, knowing what we knew about the spies' capabilities even then, the sense of being always potentially watched has never rubbed off.

The Bigger Picture



So, knowing absolutely that I have never watched any online porn and that I always keep my computer camera lens covered, “Susana” and “Jillie” can go whistle. You have tried to shake down the wrong paranoid ex-MI5 whistleblower, darlings. And my tech people are now hunting you.

Any possible audio could, I suppose, be spliced in some way to some dodgy video to make this the stuff of a blackmailer’s dreams. That, surely, will be easy to “forensicate” – and indeed I have other friends who can do this, at world class level.

Alternatively, the former love at the time could have recorded the audio for his own nefarious personal usage for some nebulous time in the future. And if that future is now, after he had shown himself a long time ago to be chronically dishonest, why do this in 2018 when we have been separated for years?

He may have possibly continued to use the old email account himself to watch vile material – he certainly had the password back then and perhaps he uses it to distance himself from his own porn habit (fapware, as the geeks call it)? If that is the case, he is even less honorable than I had considered him to be.

Or perhaps this is some type of dark LoveInt operation by the spooks, in some failed attempt to frighten or embarrass me?

But there is, of course, a bigger, more political picture.

Ever since I worked as an intelligence officer for MI5, before going on the run with Shayler during the whistleblowing years in the late 1990s, I have been painfully aware of the tech capabilities of the spies. Even back then we knew that computers could be captured by adversaries and turned against you – keystroke loggers, remote recording via microphones, cameras switched on to watch you, and many other horrors.

The whistleblowing of Edward Snowden back in 2013 has confirmed all this and more on an industrial, global scale – we are all potentially at risk of this particular invasion of our personal privacy. I have kept my computer and mobile camera lenses covered for all these years precisely because of this threat.

One specific Snowden disclosure, which has received little mainstream media traction, was a programme called OPTIC NERVE. This was a GCHQ program (funded by American money) that allowed the spooks to intercept in real time video conferencing calls. It turned out, horror, that 10 percent of them were of a salacious nature, and the spooks were shocked!

I have spoken about privacy and surveillance at conferences around the world and have many, many times had to debate the supposition that “if you are doing

nothing wrong, you have nothing to hide.”

However, most people would like to keep their intimate relationships private. In this era of work travel and long distance relationships, more of us might well have intimate conversations and even video play via the internet. In an adult, consensual and mutually pleasurable context, we are doing nothing wrong and we have nothing to hide, but we surely don't want the spooks to be watching us or listening in, any more than we would want the criminals capturing images and trying to shake us down for money.

This low-level and laughably amateur attempt at extortion is risible. Unfortunately, the threat from our governments spying on us all is not.

Annie Machon is a former intelligence officer in the UK's domestic MI5 Security Service.

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Letter from Britain—Lost in a Brexit Maze: a Baffled Political Class Dreads the Prospect of Jeremy Corbyn

The British Establishment wants to protect the expanded privileges it inherited from Margaret Thatcher's neoliberal legacy but appears clueless about how to deal with an increasingly rebellious British public, as Alexander Mercouris explains.

By Alexander Mercouris

in London

Special to Consortium News



Donald Trump's recent trip to Britain – happening against the backdrop of the sweltering heat of an unusually protracted summer heatwave – took place at a time when Britain's political system is closer to breakdown than at any time in my memory.

The immediate crisis centres on a Brexit plan which British Prime Minister Theresa May unveiled to her top ministers at a closed meeting at Chequers (the British Prime Minister's official country residence) earlier this month.

It is fair to say this plan (two years in the making and details still to be worked out), which proposes a relationship between Britain and the EU similar to those agreed by Ukraine and Moldova, satisfies no-one.

The hardline Brexiteers, who account for a significant minority of the elected members of Parliament (MPs) of May's Conservative Party and an overwhelming majority of the Conservative Party's membership and supporters in the country, are unhappy because they are not getting the clear break from the EU which they expected and which they believed they had been promised after Leave won the 2016 referendum.

Opponents of Brexit, made up of the overwhelming majority of opposition Labour Party MPs and its membership, as well as a small number of Conservative MPs, the bulk of the civil service, the business community and the labour unions basically don't want Brexit to happen and want Britain to remain in the EU. They are unhappy because despite the continued connection to the EU Britain would still be leaving the EU.

As for the EU itself, it has remained uncharacteristically quiet since the plan was published, but its senior officials have made clear they will probably reject it because it crosses too many of its red lines.

How did Britain – two years after the question of Britain's exit from the EU appeared to have been answered in the June 2016 referendum – end up with such a plan, and how does that connect to the broader political crisis which is underway in Britain today?

How It Came to Pass



In order to answer that question a good place to start is to look at the Brexit referendum itself, and how it came to pass, and how contrary to all expectations May became British Prime Minister immediately following it.

The key point to make about the Brexit referendum is that it would never have been called if there had been any genuine belief (or fear) within Britain's political class that it would result in a vote for Britain to leave the EU.

David Cameron – the British Conservative Prime Minister who called the referendum – did so not to settle what he believed as a burning debate in Britain, but in order to outflank his critics within the Conservative Party and in the country, who were using his supposed loyalty to the EU as a political stick to beat him with.

Cameron himself – along with the rest of the British establishment – assumed however that the greater part of the British public was bored and indifferent to the question of Britain's EU membership (Cameron once spoke of the need for the Conservative Party "to stop banging on about Europe"). Accordingly he assumed that once the referendum was called his critics would be quickly exposed as obsessive and marginal figures, out of touch with public opinion.

However, Boris Johnson, a former mayor of London had emerged as an important

rival to Cameron for the leadership of the Conservative Party, and who after much agonising joined the Leave Europe campaign because he thought that doing so would position him better for a future leadership bid.

These essentially frivolous reasons for Cameron's and Johnson's actions before and during the referendum illustrate the chronic amateurism of much of Britain's political class, especially that part of it which is associated with the Conservative Party—where high political office more often than not depends on wealth and social status than on experience or ability.

Both Cameron and Johnson are in fact typical members of Britain's political and social elite. Both were born to wealth, and both of them were educated at Eton College and Oxford University, where as it happens both men belonged to the same social club, albeit at different times.

Eton College and Oxford University happen to be the two most famous educational institutions within the inordinately expensive and socially exclusive private educational system which trains Britain's establishment. Access to both is effectively barred for cost reasons to the overwhelming majority of Britain's population. However admission to them – especially to Eton College – acts as a passport to high office for those members of the elite who want it.

Complete Misjudgment

In the event, and not for the last time, the referendum result showed that Cameron, Johnson and the rest of the British establishment had completely misjudged the views and attitudes of the British population.

Instead of being bored and indifferent to the subject of Europe, British voters turned out to vote in what are by today's standards high numbers (turnout was 72.2%, significantly higher than in recent general elections). More to the point, instead of (as expected) voting to stay in the EU they voted – albeit by a small margin of 52-48% – to leave.

The immediate result was the political establishment went through the political equivalent of a nervous breakdown. Cameron – overwhelmed by forces he had unleashed but barely understood, and not knowing what to do next – broke a promise he had given previously to stay irrespective of the referendum and resigned immediately. Johnson, equally unsure what to do in a situation he had never anticipated or prepared for, in turn bungled his own leadership bid, and failed to replace Cameron.

The result was that the post of British Prime Minister passed by default to May, a colourless and unimaginative administrator, whose lack of even the most basic political skills became cruelly exposed during the general election she called

completely unnecessarily last year, which she nearly lost.

Since becoming Prime Minister, May – as might be expected of such a person – has approached the question of Brexit as an essentially technical question, to be ironed out in negotiations, with the overarching objective being to cause as little disruption to the British economy as possible so that things can continue to go on as before.

Inevitably that is an approach which favours keeping as much of the status quo as possible, with May looking to achieve a Brexit which retains Britain's economic and trading links with the EU essentially unaffected.

Rejection of an Intolerable Status Quo

The result is a 98-page proposal for an association agreement between Britain and the EU, directly copied from those agreed with the EU by Moldova and Ukraine, whereby Britain would remain in fact, though not in name, a member of the European Single Market. Its economy would observe the EU's regulatory structure as administered by the European Court of Justice, whose decisions on regulatory questions would continue to be binding on British companies.

Unsurprisingly this 'solution', which would leave Britain indefinitely subject to EU-made laws, in the making of which it would no longer have any say, satisfies nobody, and is being criticised by all sides.

The latest opinion poll shows that only 25% of Britons now think May is managing the negotiations with the EU successfully.

It would be a fundamental error however to see May as the cause of what practically everyone in Britain now agrees is a debacle. If May were the only problem, there would be no problem getting rid of her and replacing her with someone else. The fact that May is still there despite her all too obvious flaws and failures illustrates the underlying point: the problem is not May; it is Britain's entire political class.

A proper response to the Brexit vote would have recognised that whatever it was, it was a rejection of the status quo, which has obviously become intolerable to much of the British public. Any response to the Brexit vote, which – like May's plan – seeks to preserve the status quo, is therefore by definition flawed.

The British political class, once renowned for its sure-footedness and flexibility, would once have had no difficulty recognising this fact, unwelcome though it was. It would accordingly have focused its energy on responding to the Brexit vote in the way desired by the majority of British voters, by considering what part of the status quo has become objectionable and how it can be changed.

The focus would not have been on the negotiations, which by definition can only be a means to an end, but on formulating a plan to take Britain forward once it was outside the EU whilst responding to the concerns of the British public..

That would have required a thorough study of the state of Britain's society and economy, leading to what might have been a heated but real debate about what was needed to be changed. Eventually, after a period of acrimony and argument, a programme to prepare Britain for life outside the EU would have emerged and a negotiating position could have been formed around it, which could have been presented to the EU in the negotiations.

There is no of course guarantee the EU would have agreed to whatever the British proposed, but at least a proper discussion would have happened followed by a real negotiation between two equal partners, with the British knowing their own minds and having a set of clear goals which they would have been working towards. If the negotiations were unsuccessful the British would then have been free to put their plans into effect by themselves, with steps taken in advance to prepare for that contingency.

No Debate

In the event nothing like that has happened. There has been no debate within the British establishment either about the state of Britain or about what needs to be done to change it. Nor have any serious steps been taken to prepare for the possibility that the negotiations with the EU might be unsuccessful.

The reason for that is that taking a close, hard look at the state of Britain's society and economy and working out a programme of reform to adjust them to the world after Brexit is something that Britain's establishment is today both unable and unwilling to do. As beneficiaries of the 1980s Thatcherite settlement they want things to remain as they are, and have no wish or idea of how to change them. Besides, it is doubtful whether they any longer have either the technical skill or the experience, or even the self-confidence to meet such a challenge.

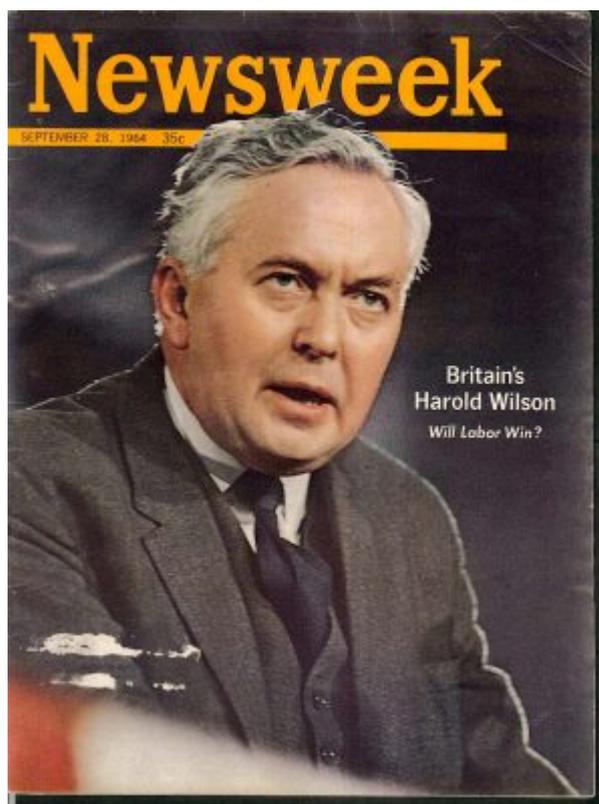
The result is that instead of the genuine debate that needs to happen about what sort of country Britain needs to be, there has been a sterile debate between supporters of 'soft Brexit', which it is now clear boils down to May's proposed association agreement with the EU, and 'hard Brexit', with advocates of the latter talking grandly about a clean break with the EU and about trading with the EU on World Trade Organisation terms, but without having much idea of what that means in practice.

In such a situation it becomes easier to understand why despite her failures,

May remains Prime Minister. In a vacuum of ideas a Prime Minister without ideas appears to suit the situation.

In reality, outside the establishment, there is no shortage in Britain today of ideas about how to take the country forward.

The individual who has come to crystallise for many people the challenge to the status quo is Jeremy Corbyn, the veteran left wing politician who leads the Labour Party. He not only very visibly bested May in last year's general election, but most certainly does have a set of ideas for taking Britain forward.



Corbyn is one of the most misrepresented figures in British politics. By the standards of earlier Labour politicians he is by no means radical. His desire for a mixed economy, with significant sections brought back into public ownership and certain elements of planning reintroduced, and his support for strong social services and for high investment in state funded education and health care are all to be paid for through progressive taxation. His longstanding opposition to military adventures overseas, as well, all fall squarely within what was once the British Labour Party's social democratic mainstream.

At any time up to the 1980s Corbyn's current policy positions (as opposed to some of the positions he once held in his youth) would not have been considered controversial in Labour terms. On the contrary they represent a return to the policies followed in Britain's social democratic heyday by the previous Labour governments of Clement Attlee and Harold Wilson.

Even Corbyn's well known support for extra Parliamentary political activity, which many of his critics profess to see as somehow dangerous and 'extreme', is actually in Labour Party terms completely traditional. The Labour Party after all is itself the product of extra Parliamentary political activity, having been formed at the start of the twentieth century by Britain's labour unions and by various voluntary societies operating outside Parliament. Indeed for most of its history the Labour Party spoke of itself as the "political wing" of a "Labour

movement” whose “industrial wing” was the labour unions.

Clinging to Class Interests

The difficulty is that though Corbyn’s social democratic programme does indeed offer an alternative to the Thatcherite settlement, which in Britain represents the status quo, and is a conceivable programme around which to prepare Britain for life outside the EU, it is also one which is completely unacceptable to Britain’s establishment.

Ever since the 1990s the establishment has not only accepted the 1980s Thatcher neoliberal settlement, but has massively benefitted from it to the point where in the public mind it is increasingly associated with it. The idea that it could be successfully challenged was until recently, for the establishment, literally unthinkable since that would have meant acknowledging that the status and power of the establishment itself could be challenged.

That is why until the 2017 election the establishment – which to be clear includes the entire parliamentary faction of the Labour Party and the media – found it impossible to take Corbyn seriously. It is also why Corbyn is the target of such extreme establishment hostility, including from within his own party.

As a result of the outcome of the 2017 election, which showed that Corbyn’s programme is actually popular – especially amongst Britons of working age and younger– came as a shock. It was for the establishment at least as great a shock as that of the Brexit referendum of the year before.

Not only was the election outcome horrifying to them in itself, but it also – like the result of the Brexit referendum – further underscored the extent to which the establishment has lost ground with the public.

It is that sense of disconnection which gives the political crisis in Britain its peculiar character. An establishment which senses itself challenged and which is no longer sure of its support in the country is afraid to risk the traditional method in Britain of resolving a political crisis, which is another general election. Indeed it is now so insecure about its position that it is nervous of taking any step at all, such as replacing a Prime Minister who is discredited and unpopular.

Different Than the Nineties

The situation differs fundamentally from the one in the early 1990s, when another Conservative government had become unpopular. Though the Conservatives at that time were divided and unpopular, the part of the British establishment

associated with the Labour Party was brimming with self-confidence, and was both eager and able to take charge. Since it too was fully committed to preserving the 1980s Thatcher settlement, an election did not threaten fundamental change or challenge the position of the establishment in the way that an election might do now.

The result is an impasse, with the establishment – including sections of the Labour Party – desperate at almost any cost to avoid an election and the attendant risk of a Corbyn government, but incapable of formulating an alternative path forward.

The nature of the crisis is elegantly summed up in the following words of an [article in *The Guardian*](#), quoting the comments of a senior Conservative MP.

A senior Tory backbencher on the 1922 committee executive said on Thursday that May had the “best chief whip ever” and that he would still save her. “He is called Jeremy Corbyn. Just mention the threat of a Corbyn government and our people come into line.”

The reality is that political logic clearly points to the need for a Corbyn government. Given that Corbyn is the only leader who is offering a way forward, a government led by him is the only way to restore a sense of direction and coherence. Resisting that logic is simply deepening the crisis and creating more drift. One senses that government has all but broken down, with only administrative tasks still being performed, as senior ministers plot and war against each other, without however having any overarching idea of what they want to do.

Whether a Corbyn government, if it were elected, would be able to implement its programme in the face of the immense opposition it would face is another matter. Corbyn has so far repeatedly defied predictions by overcoming every obstacle in his path. Whether as Prime Minister he would be able to go on doing so is a question only the future can tell.

What is beyond doubt however is that a Corbyn government must be tried. The alternative is that the crisis becomes entrenched and deepens, in which case other, altogether more alarming forces might start to emerge. Already what looks like [the early signs of this](#) are there.

Gramsci put it best: “The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear.”

In Britain – as any reader of British newspapers knows – the “morbid symptoms” are currently there in abundance.

Alexander Mercouris is a political commentator and editor of [The Duran](#).

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GOP and Corporate Dems Gain When Democrats Run Against Putin

Hammering on Russia is a losing strategy for progressives as most Americans care about economic issues and it is the Republicans and corporate Democrats who stand to gain, argues Norman Solomon.

By Norman Solomon



Progressives should figure it out. Amplifying the anti-Russia din helps to drown out the left’s core messages for economic fairness, equal rights, environmental protection, diplomacy and so much more. Echoing the racket of blaming Russia for the USA’s severe shortages of democracy plays into the hands of Republicans and corporate Democrats eager to block progressive momentum.

When riding on the “Russiagate” bandwagon, progressives unwittingly aid political forces that are eager to sideline progressive messages. And with the midterm elections now scarcely 100 days away, the torrents of [hyperbolic](#) and [hypocritical](#) claims about Russia keep diverting attention from why it’s so important to defeat Republicans.

As a practical matter, devoting massive amounts of time and resources to focusing on Russia has reduced capacities to effectively challenge the domestic forces that are assaulting democratic possibilities at home – with such tactics as state voter ID laws, purging of voter rolls, and numerous barriers to suppress turnout by people of color.

Instead of keeping eyes on the prize, some of the Democratic base has been watching and trusting media outlets like MSNBC. An extreme Russia obsession at the network has left precious little airtime to expose and challenge the vast quantity of terrible domestic-policy measures being advanced by the Trump administration every day.

Likewise with the U.S. government's militarism. While some Democrats and Republicans in Congress have put forward legislation to end the active U.S. role in Saudi Arabia's mass-murderous war on Yemen, those efforts face a steeper uphill climb because of MSNBC.

This week, under the headline "It's Been Over a Year Since MSNBC Has Mentioned U.S. War in Yemen," journalist Adam Johnson reported for the media watchdog group FAIR about the collapse of journalistic decency at MSNBC, under the weight of the network's Russia Russia Russia obsession. Johnson's article asks a big-type question: "Why is the No. 1 outlet of alleged anti-Trump #resistance completely ignoring his most devastating war?"

The FAIR report says: "What seems most likely is MSNBC has found that attacking Russia from the right on matters of foreign policy is the most elegant way to preserve its 'progressive' image while still serving traditional centers of power – namely, the Democratic Party establishment, corporate sponsors, and their own revolving door of ex-spook and military contractor-funded talking heads."

Russia Doesn't Concern Americans

Corporate media have been exerting enormous pressure on Democratic officeholders and candidates to follow a thin blue party line on Russia. Yet polling shows that few Americans see Russia as a threat to their well-being; they're far more concerned about such matters as healthcare, education, housing and overall economic security.

The gap between most Americans and media elites is clear in a nationwide poll taken after the Trump-Putin summit in Helsinki, which was fiercely condemned by the punditocracy. As *The Hill* newspaper reported this week under the headline "Most Americans Back Trump's Call for Follow-Up Summit With Putin," 54 percent of respondents favored plans for a second summit. "The survey also found that 61 percent of Americans say better relations with Russia are in the best interest of the United States."

Yet most Democratic Party leaders have very different priorities. After investing so much political capital in portraying Putin's government as an implacable enemy of the United States, top Democrats on Capitol Hill are hardly inclined to help thaw relations between the world's two nuclear superpowers.

It would be easy for news watchers to see that the Democratic Party is much more committed to a hard line against Russia than a hard line against the corporate forces imposing extreme economic inequality here at home.

National polling underscores just how out of whack and out of touch the party's

top dogs are. Last month, the Gallup organization asked: "What do you think is the most important problem facing the country today?" The results were telling. "Situation with Russia" came in at below one-half of 1 percent.

The day after the Helsinki summit, *The Washington Post* reported: "Citing polls and focus groups that have put Trump and Russia far down the list of voter priorities, Democratic strategists have counseled candidates and party leaders for months to discuss 'kitchen table' issues. Now, after a remarkable 46-minute news conference on foreign soil where Trump stood side by side with a former KGB agent to praise his 'strong' denials of election interference and criticize the FBI, those strategists believe the ground may have shifted."

Prominent corporate Democrats who want to beat back the current progressive groundswell inside their party are leading the charge. Jim Kessler, a senior vice president at the "centrist" Third Way organization, was quick to proclaim after the summit: "It got simple real fast. I've talked to a lot of Democrats that are running in purple and red states and districts who have said that Russia rarely comes up back home, and I think that has now changed."

The Democratic National Committee and other official arms of the party keep sending out Russia-bashing emails to millions of people on a nearly daily basis. At times the goals seem to involve generating and exploiting manic panic.

At the end of last week, as soon as the White House announced plans (later postponed) for Vladimir Putin to meet with President Trump in Washington this fall, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee fired off a mass email – from "RUSSIA ALERT (via DCCC)" – declaring that the Russian president "must NOT be allowed to set foot in our country." The email strained to conflate a summit with Russian interference in U.S. elections. "We cannot overstate how dangerous this is," the DCCC gravely warned. And: "We need to stop him at all costs."

For Democrats who move in elite circles, running against Putin might seem like a smart election move. But for voters worried about economic insecurity and many other social ills, a political party obsessed with Russia is likely to seem aloof and irrelevant to their lives.

Norman Solomon is the national coordinator of the online activist group RootsAction.org and the executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy. He is the author of a dozen books including "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death."

The Gray Lady Thinks Twice About Assange's Prosecution

Though *The New York Times* itself has not reported it, it's No. 2 lawyer told a group of judges that the prosecution of Julian Assange could have dire consequences for the *Times* itself, explains Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



Well, lordy be. A lawyer for *The New York Times* has figured out that prosecuting WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange might gore the ox of The Gray Lady herself.

The *Times*'s deputy general counsel, David McCraw, told a group of judges on the West Coast on Tuesday that such prosecution would be a gut punch to free speech, according to Maria Dinzeo, [writing](#) for the *Courthouse News Service*.

Curiously, as of this writing, McCraw's words have found no mention in the *Times* itself. In recent years, the newspaper has shown a marked proclivity to avoid printing anything that might risk its front row seat at the government trough.

Stating the obvious, McCraw noted that the "prosecution of him [Assange] would be a very, very bad precedent for publishers ... he's sort of in a classic publisher's position and I think the law would have a very hard time drawing a distinction between *The New York Times* and WikiLeaks."

That's because, for one thing, the *Times* itself published many stories based on classified information revealed by WikiLeaks and other sources. The paper decisively turned against Assange once WikiLeaks published the DNC and Podesta emails.

More broadly, no journalist in America since [John Peter Zenger](#) in Colonial days has been indicted or imprisoned for their work. Unless American prosecutors could prove that Assange personally took part in the theft of classified material or someone's emails, rather than just receiving and publishing them, prosecuting him merely for his publications would be a first since the British Governor General of New York, William Cosby, imprisoned Zenger in 1734 for ten months for printing articles critical of Cosby. Zenger was acquitted by a jury because what he had printed was proven to be factual—a claim WikiLeaks can also

make.

McCraw went on to emphasize that, “Assange should be afforded the same protections as a traditional journalist.” The *Times* lawyer avoided criticizing what the United Nations has branded – twice – the “arbitrary detention” of Assange and his incommunicado, solitary confinement-like situation in the Ecuador embassy in London since March. Multiple reports indicate the new government of Ecuador will evict Assange into the hands of British police.

These days we need to be thankful for small favors. It’s nice to know the *Times* now considers Assange a journalist, even though it did not spring to his defense when he was being widely branded a “high-tech terrorist” – as can be seen here in my very last appearance on CNN’s domestic broadcast almost eight years ago.

Mike Pompeo, when he was CIA director, called WikiLeaks a “non-state, hostile intelligence service,” and Assange’s lawyers believe there is already a sealed indictment against him in the state of Virginia. Assange fears that if he is arrested on flimsy bail skipping charges he will be extradited to the United States.

Is the Fourth Estate Dead?

Ten years ago I contended that The Gray Lady – like the rest of the Fourth Estate – was moribund. More recently, I have been saying it is dead. I now stand corrected. Rumors of its death have been exaggerated. But how does one characterize its current state?

Let me borrow a memorable phrase from philosopher Billy Crystal, playing Miracle Max in “The Princess Bride,” while trying to bring the character Wesley back to life. He is just “mostly dead,” Chrystal insisted.

And so it is with today’s corporate media, with a tiny chance, now that *The New York Times*, watching out for its own equities, might help Assange avoid prosecution for practicing journalism. Actually, he has been accused so far of no crime of any kind.

Eight years ago, when the Sam Adams Associates for Integrity gave Assange its annual award, the Fourth Estate was a bit more than just a distant memory. So we attempted to put his award in historical perspective. Below is the text of the citation presented to Assange, together with the traditional SAAI corner-brightener candlestick holder, by former UK Ambassador Craig Murray (himself an SAAI laureate) and Daniel Ellsberg.

Sam Adams Associates Award

Julian Assange



It seems altogether fitting and proper that this year's award be presented in London, where Edmund Burke coined the expression "Fourth

Estate." Comparing the function of the press to that of the three Houses then in Parliament, Burke said:

"...but in the Reporters Gallery yonder, there sits a Fourth Estate more important far than they all."

The year was 1787—the year the U.S. Constitution was adopted. The First Amendment, approved four years later, aimed at ensuring that the press would be free of government interference. That was then.

With the Fourth Estate now on life support, there is a high premium on the fledgling Fifth Estate, which uses the ether and is not susceptible of government or corporation control. Small wonder that governments with lots to hide feel very threatened.

It has been said: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free." WikiLeaks is helping make that possible by publishing documents that do not lie.

Last spring, when we chose WikiLeaks and Julian Assange for this award, Julian said he would accept only "on behalf of our sources, without which WikiLeaks' contributions are of no significance."

We do not know if Pvt. Bradley Manning gave WikiLeaks the gun-barrel video of July 12, 2007 called "Collateral Murder." Whoever did provide that graphic footage, showing the brutality of the celebrated "surge" in Iraq, was certainly far more a patriot than the "mainstream" journalist embedded in that same Army unit. He suppressed what happened in Baghdad that day, dismissed it as simply "one bad day in a surge that was filled with such days," and then

had the temerity to lavish praise on the unit in a book he called “The Good Soldiers.”

Julian is right to emphasize that the world is deeply indebted to patriotic truth-tellers like the sources who provided the gun-barrel footage and the many documents on Afghanistan and Iraq to WikiLeaks. We hope to have a chance to honor them in person in the future.

Today we honor WikiLeaks, and one of its leaders, Julian Assange, for their ingenuity in creating a new highway by which important documentary evidence can make its way, quickly and confidentially, through the ether and into our in-boxes. Long live the Fifth Estate!

Presented this 23rd day of October 2010 in London, England by admirers of the example set by former CIA analyst, Sam Adams

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was an Army infantry/intelligence officer and then a CIA analyst for a total of 30 years. He is co-founder of Sam Adams Associates for Integrity in Intelligence.

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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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Catalonian Quest for Independence is Undeterred

In an interview with Consortium News, an independence leader and member of the Spanish parliament tells Attilio Moro that Catalonians are not finished seeking separation from Madrid.

By Attilio Moro

in Barcelona

Special to Consortium News



“Freedom for the political prisoners,” read banners hanging on hundreds of balconies from Placa Catalunya to La Ramblas, and from the Vila de Gracia to the Gothic Quarter. They were calling for freedom for the many grass roots activists demanding independence from Spain who were arrested. And for the freedom of Charles Puigdemont, the ex-President of Generalitat de Catalunya, who was arrested in March by German authorities. A German judge rejected Spain’s extradition request on July 19. He would face rebellion and sedition charges if he returned to Spain.

Puigdemont had escaped to Belgium the day after the independence referendum on October 1, 2017 with Spanish police on his heels. Madrid’s secret service agents then hid a GPS tracker on the car he was traveling in from Helsinki, where he had attended a conference, back to Brussels. He is now in Hamburg, under surveillance by the German police.

Eight ministers of the dissolved Catalonian government (vice-president Junqueras, Joseph Rull, Dolores Bassa, Meri Borrás, Joaquim Forn, Charles Mund, Jordi Torull, Raul Romeva) are all being held in a Madrid prison, under accusation of having threatened the integrity on Spain. Seven independence leaders and intellectuals escaped to Scotland and Holland to avoid arrest.

No weapons or violence were used when these leaders organized the overwhelmingly successful independence referendum, which Madrid argued violated the Spanish constitution. The arrests were made to prevent the referendum from being implemented.

Earlier this month at the headquarters of the Partit Democrata, one of the two big independence Catalan parties, I met Sergi Miquel, an independence leader and member of the national parliament.

“My generation had never seen these kind of measures being taken, we thought

they belonged to the past, to the Franco era," he told me. "But all of this is happening instead today in Spain, in Europe: democratically elected MPs and governors being arrested and detained for political reasons. The sentence will come in autumn. They risk up to thirty years in prison."

I asked Miquel whether the new Spanish minority government of Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez will be more willing to compromise than the former prime minister, Mariano Rajoy.

"In two years time there will be fresh elections in Spain, and none of the political parties will even talk to us, in order not to lose the Spanish voters who are against us," Miquel said. "Our leaders may even receive an exemplar punishment. Much will depend on Europe: the EU should stop turning a blind eye to this flagrant violation of democracy and human rights happening in its territory."

On July 9 Sanchez and Quim Torra, Catalonia's premier who took over from Puigdemont, met in Madrid, trying to revive dialogue. They agreed to restart meetings after seven years between Spanish and Catalan ministers. And they discussed the possibility of jointly commemorating the terrorist attack in Barcelona last August. But Sanchez was adamantly against Catalonia holding a new independence referendum.

'Independence Awaits'

I asked Miquel what can be done in the meantime for the Catalan prisoners. "Unfortunately not much," he said. "Since last March the families of the prisoners have been given just one days' travel to see their relatives for 45 minutes in a Madrid prison. We ask – and humanitarian organizations should join us – that they at least be transferred to a prison in Barcelona. Of course we hope for an amnesty, since no serious crime has been committed. We hope that the new government, after next election, will be formed by the Socialist Party and the political group least hostile to us, Podemos."

Miquel did not rule out the Catalan government organizing a new referendum on independence, despite the arrests, and the violent crackdown against voters the first time. "We can suffer losses and drawbacks, but our path is set," he said.

Miquel said even seeking more autonomy from Madrid, at least in the short term, would be difficult.

"We would be ready," he said. "But the Spanish government will not concede this. On the contrary, they are slowly eroding the little autonomy we managed to achieve over the past 50 years. The Basques today are much more autonomous than us. We want our right to self-determination to be recognized in Spain and

Europe. We know that the process will be long and complex. We will have to confront other difficulties, arrests and rights violations. But we know that at the end of our path, independence awaits.”

Attilio Moro is a veteran Italian journalist who was a correspondent for the daily *Il Giorno* from New York and worked earlier in both radio (Italia Radio) and TV. He has travelled extensively, covering the first Iraq war, the first elections in Cambodia and South Africa, and has reported from Pakistan, Lebanon, Jordan and several Latin American countries, including Cuba, Ecuador and Argentina. Presently he is a correspondent on European affairs based in Brussels.

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