

Have British Spies Been Hacking the EU?

The European Union has accused British intelligence agencies of disrupting Brexit negotiations—creating a new public dispute that could poison further an already toxic situation, says Annie Machon.

**By Annie Machon
in Brussels**

Special to Consortium News



Just after midnight on Aug. 16, I was called by LBC Radio in London for a comment on a breaking story on the front page of *The Daily Telegraph* about British spies hacking the EU. Even though I had just retired to bed, the story was just too irresistible, but a radio interview is always too short to do justice to such a convoluted tale. Here are some longer thoughts.

For those who cannot get past the *Telegraph* paywall, the gist is that that the European Union has accused the British intelligence agencies of hacking the EU's side of the Brexit negotiations. Apparently, some highly sensitive and negative EU slides about British Prime Minister Theresa May's plan for Brexit, the Chequers Plan, had landed in the lap of the British government, which then lobbied the EU to suppress publication.

Of course, this could be a genuine leak from the Brussels sieve, as British sources are claiming (well, they would say that, wouldn't they?). However, it is plausible that this is the work of the spies, either by recruiting a paid-up agent well placed within the Brussels bureaucracy, or through electronic surveillance.

The Ugly Truth of Spying

Before dismissing the latter option as conspiracy theory, the British spies do have experience. In the run-up to the Iraq war in 2003, the United States and the United Kingdom were desperate to get a United Nations Security Council resolution to invade Iraq, thus providing a fig leaf of apparent legitimacy to the illegal war. However, some countries within the UN had their doubts (including France and Germany), and the U.S. asked Britain's listening post, GCHQ, to step up its surveillance game. Forewarned is forearmed in delicate international negotiations.

How do we know this? A brave GCHQ whistleblower named Katharine Gun leaked the information to *The Observer*. For her pains, she was threatened with prosecution under the draconian terms of the UK's 1989 Official Secrets Act and faced two

years in prison. The case was only dropped three weeks before her trial was due to begin, partly because of the feared public outcry, but mainly because her lawyers threatened to use the legal defense of “necessity”—a defense won only three years before during the case of MI5 whistleblower David Shayler. Tangentially, a film is being made about Gunn’s story this year.

We also have confirmation from one of the early 2013 Edward Snowden disclosures that GCHQ had hacked its way into the Belgacom network—the national telecommunications supplier in Belgium. Even back then, there was an outcry from the EU bodies, worried that the UK (and by extension its closest intelligence buddy, the U.S.), would gain leverage with stolen knowledge.

So, yes, it is perfectly feasible that the UK *could* have done this, even though it was illegal back in the day. GCHQ’s incestuous relationship with America’s National Security Agency gives it massively greater capabilities than other European intelligence agencies. The EU knows this well, which is why it is concerned to retain access to the UK’s defense and security powers post-Brexit, and also why it has jumped to these conclusions about hacking.

Somebody Needs to Watch the Watchers

But that was then, and this is now. On Jan. 1, 2017, the UK government finally signed a law called the Investigatory Powers Act, governing the legal framework for GCHQ to snoop. The IPA gave GCHQ the most draconian and invasive powers of any Western democracy. Otherwise known in the British media as the “snoopers’ charter,” the IPA had been defeated in Parliament for years, but Theresa May, then home secretary, pushed it through in the teeth of legal and civil society opposition. This year, the High Court ordered the UK government to redraft the IPA as it is incompatible with European law.

The IPA legalized what GCHQ previously had been doing illegally post-9/11, including bulk metadata collection, bulk data hacking, and bulk hacking of electronic devices.

It also gave the government greater oversight of the spies’ actions, but these measures remain weak and offer no protection if the spies choose to keep quiet about what they are doing. So if GCHQ did indeed hack the EU, it is feasible that the foreign secretary and the prime minister remained ignorant of what was going on, despite being legally required to sign off on such operations. In which case the spies would be running amok.

It is also feasible that they were indeed fully briefed, and that would have been proper protocol. GCHQ and the other spy agencies are required to protect “national security and the economic well-being” of Great Britain, and I can

certainly see a strong argument could be made that they were doing precisely that (provided they had prior written permission for such a sensitive operation) if they tried to get advance intelligence about the EU's Brexit strategy.

This argument becomes even more powerful when you consider the problems around the fraught issue of the border between the UK's Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland, an issue about which the EU is being particularly intransigent. If a deal is not made, the 1998 Good Friday Agreement could be under threat and civil war might break out again in Northern Ireland. You cannot get much more "national security" than that, and GCHQ would be justified in this work, provided it has acquired the necessary legal sign-offs from its political masters.

Our Complicated World

However, these arguments will do nothing to appease the enraged EU officials. The UK government will continue to state that this was a leak from a Brussels insider, and publicly at least, oil will be seen to have been poured on troubled diplomatic waters.

Behind the scenes, though, this action will multiply the mutual suspicion and no doubt unleash a witch hunt through the corridors of EU power, with top civil servant Martin Selmayr (aka "The Monster") cast as witchfinder general. With him on your heels, you would have to be a brave leaker, whistleblower or even paid-up agent working for the Brits to take such a risk.

So, perhaps this is indeed a GCHQ hack. However justifiable the move might be under the nebulous concept of "national security," this event will poison further the already toxic Brexit negotiations. As Angela Merkel famously, if disingenuously, said after the Snowden revelation that the U.S. had hacked her mobile phone: "No spying among friends." But perhaps this is an outdated concept—and the EU has not been entirely friendly to Brexit Britain.

I am just waiting for the first hysterical claim that it was the Russians instead or, failing them, former Trump strategist in chief, Steve Bannon, reportedly on a mission to build a divisive alt-right movement across Europe.

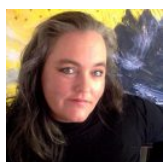
Annie Machon is a former intelligence officer in the UK's domestic MI5 Security Service.

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How to Beat a Manipulator

In our political and personal lives many of us have been conned. Here's how to recognize how politicians and people manipulate us and how to stop them, according to Caitlin Johnstone.

By Caitlin Johnstone



Humans are hackable. Ask any conman. Our desire to think we have control over our lives often hides this from ourselves, but most of us are highly suggestible and hypnotizable. If you think you're not, you're in more danger of being hacked than someone who has humbled themselves enough to see how this works in them.

There's no need to be ashamed of being conned. Realizing that you've been, or are being, conned will naturally bring up feelings of embarrassment, but it's never your fault that someone's taken you for a ride. Get clear: conning someone is the crime; being conned is being a victim of that crime. That's how the law sees it in fraud cases. Manipulators would love you to think that it's your fault for allowing yourself to be manipulated, but that's just another manipulation isn't it?

Manipulators use one of our most astounding, useful, and beautiful human characteristics when they con us—empathy. Our innately trusting nature is the reason why we've been able to collaborate on large scales to create and innovate in extraordinary ways unseen anywhere else in the animal kingdom. Because we learn by modeling, and we are shaped by the group we inhabit and our urge to create harmony will make life viscerally uncomfortable until we are back in alignment with our tribe. We are the peacemakers; we seek alignment, which is how we are paced by manipulators into aligning with their sick agendas. How gross is it then that our ability to empathize and relate to each other is one manipulators use to control us?

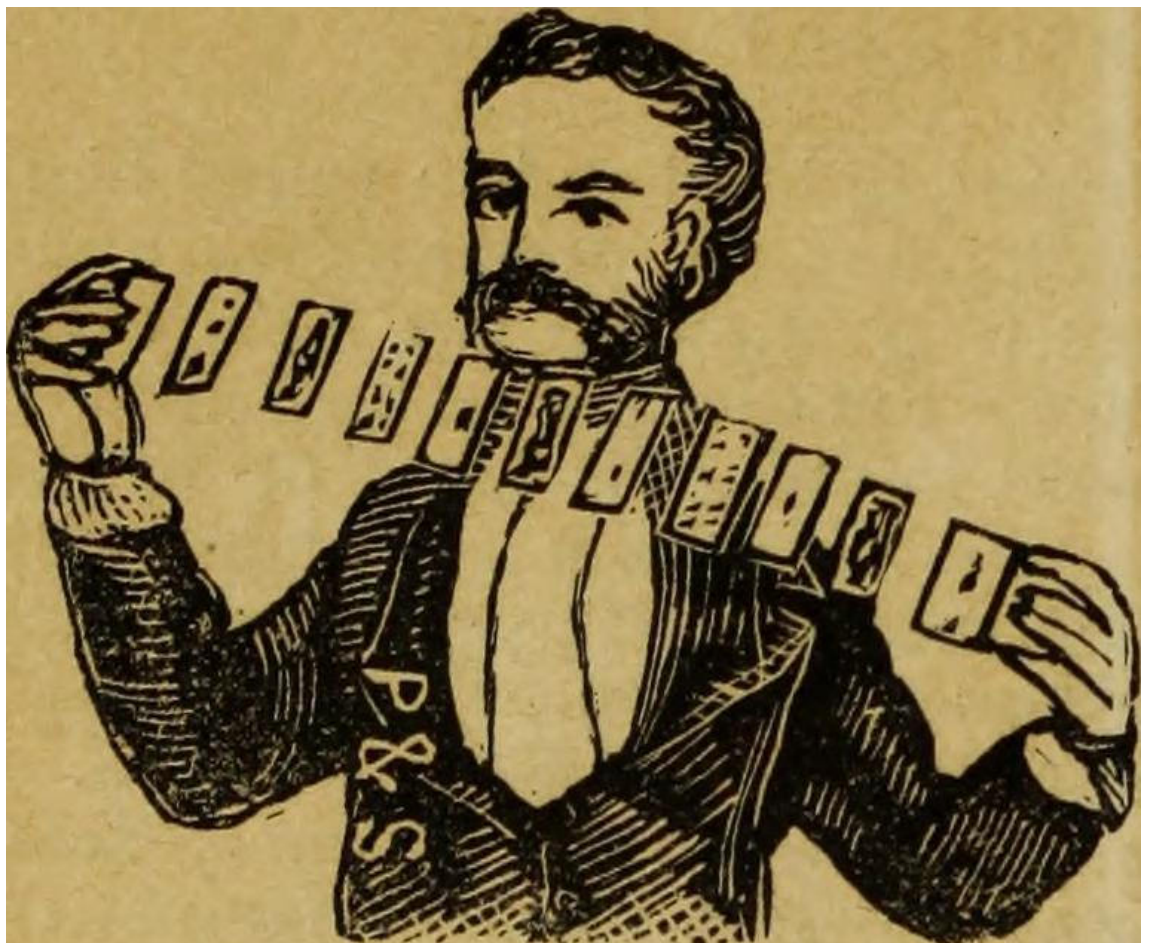
Because of the reach of mass media, every single one of us is in an abusive relationship with plutocratic manipulators. Many of us are in personal relationships with manipulators too. Conveniently, the strategies for dealing with sociopathic manipulators are the exact same, from plutocrats to your live-in partner.

Get Clear on Your Own Will

You are easy prey if you don't know what you want and you leave it up to others to decide for you. If you don't have a sense of who you are and what you stand

for, anyone can come in and co-opt that for their own sick agendas. Sit down, get quiet, and make an inventory of who you are and what you need. Don't be squeamish about adding things that you don't have yet. That's the point. Make a list of what you need not just to survive, but to thrive. Apply the live-and-let-live rule to every one of your wants, and if you're confident that nothing you want will hurt or interfere in anyone else's will, then the list is good. You can stand by it unequivocally, and you should do so with as much strength and confidence as you can muster. Grow to its size and advocate loudly for it.

Watch Where the Resources Go



How do you really know if you're being manipulated? Well, what manipulators understand that the rest of us don't is that there are real life resources like sex, money, work, gold, oil, land, water, food, people, air, etc; and there are good feelings. They will always try to get you to swap real things for good feelings. If you don't have empathy, you see the whole world in a completely different way. Most people are trying to get what they need without hurting anyone, because hurting someone hurts them too. Manipulators don't experience that, so they just get what they need by telling their victim that they'll hurt someone if they don't hand it over.

Zoom out and take an inventory of who's got all the stuff. Which way are the scales tipped? Good manipulators try to shift the ground underneath us to funnel the real wealth into their coffers, while placating us with good feelings about how blessed our hard work is and all that, and how selfish it would be to demand healthcare when there's people in Syria who need to be bombed for their freedom. Leave all that behind and zoom and out and see who's got all the stuff. Who has all the power, all the wealth, all the real stuff that you can really use in the real world, and who is barely existing but has hope for a better tomorrow?

Same in a marriage. Who has all the wealth, power, kudos, retirement savings, and who just has a story about what a good person they are? Religion has primed us for manipulation, and that was by design. Over millennia, we have been taught to value fealty, piety, hard work, submission, and to leave judgement and reward til after we die. This creates the perfect environment for manipulators who can see very clearly what the valuable real-world things are, and what are creations woven of fairytales. Work out what's real in the here and now, and see who is in control of what should be your stuff. Is it you? If it's not, you're being manipulated out of it.

Watch Their Actions, Not Their Words

Manipulators only have words. They can't just walk up to you and say "Give me your life savings," they have to weave a complex story that makes you feel like it's the right thing to do. A good conman will never ask for anything if they can get away with it. Ideally, they want you to make the offer. That's the best kind of con, the one where the victim thinks it was their idea in the first place. A great conman will have you begging him to take the thing that he wanted all along, so then he can even get your gratitude for it.

By zooming out and seeing what they're doing, rather than listening to what they're saying, you can get a much better idea of what's actually happening. If, for example, they're saying they support single-payer healthcare while voting against it, sabotaging any efforts in any direction, taking money from donors who oppose it, and generally running interference on it, then those actions tell the real story. If the offer is not what you asked for but you are so desperate, so far down the line with them, so invested, and so cut off from any alternate solutions that you'll take anything, then the con is complete.

Think about it from their point of view. Ideally, they want to be the ones you go to for the thing they don't want you to have. They want to be the ones you place your hope and energy with so you don't go to someone who will actually help them, but they also need to string you along for as long as possible, doing as little as possible, while taking as much energy as they can from you without arousing suspicion. They sing the song of inertia, of incrementalism, of "Not

now, but soon.” That’s how they keep you trapped. If you zoom out and watch what they’re actually doing, rather than what they’re saying, you will know when it’s time to say bye Felicia and seek out an actual solution.

Don’t Try to Out-Manipulate Them

Once you’ve figured out you’re being manipulated, the knee-jerk reaction is to try and manipulate them back. Dude. Don’t even. Do you know how beautiful and precious you are to even think that that’s possible? These people have had no empathy for all their lives, and without all that emotional noise clouding their decisions, they have been playing every single person in their life like a game of chess. They are masters. They are five moves ahead of you already, and you’re just learning what a rook is. They have a whole lifetime of manipulating under their belt, and you are a total noob. You will lose that game. Don’t play it.

Instead, go with your strengths. Demand what you want and stick to that, loudly and unapologetically. Keep asking for what you want in the most direct way possible. Remember, a manipulator aims to take your will from you. Take it back. Many of us have been so manipulated for so long, we don’t even know what we want anymore. Make your inventory, keep it simple, keep it to what you know you need to thrive, and then plant your feet and demand it.

Meanwhile, keep pointing out the weird things they do to try and avoid giving you what they said they would. Shout it from the rooftops when they do something sly. They’ve used your politeness and goodwill to hide their little indiscretions. Don’t let them anymore. If they’re being creepy, say it. Don’t be manipulated into tacit consent by your politeness.

Keep telling the truth to yourself at least, even when it doesn’t tally with your worldview. Remain as intellectually honest with yourself as possible about what the knowable facts are, and what is conjecture or wishful thinking. Verify everything as much as you can so you know you’re standing on solid, factual ground. Manipulators love to keep people as confused as possible. Get as many quantifiable, verified, real-world facts as you can underneath you and build your worldview on them. And when you’re sure of yourself, say it like it’s true, because you know it is. Be unequivocal with the things you know. When you’re sure, don’t let anyone get in any wriggle room. Approach your private research with curiosity, objectivity and a light hand, but once the work is done, plant your feet in its truth and don’t let them be uprooted.

And lastly, don’t play by the rules, play by what is *right*. Manipulators love rules because they love to strategize about how to bend them, and how to bend *you* with them. Think of the worst kind of lawyers and you’ll know exactly what I mean. If you’re a deeply good person like you know you are, and you are

always trying to point yourself at the highest interest, you know deep down if you're doing the right thing. Trust your guts and forge ahead. Keep doing the right thing, even if it breaks a rule.

Apply The Manipulator's Rules In Reverse

There's something in psychology called "projection", and anyone who has done a good deal of inner work will tell you that it's a handy self-enquiry tool to see if what you hate in others, you can find in yourself. In order not to deal with our guilt, we tend to project the things we don't like on to other people to hide the shame of it from ourselves. Bringing it out into the light can often result in some healthy forgiveness of both ourselves and our perception of others.

That's great, but what the sages neglect to tell you is that people are also projecting all the time on to *you*. If you're suggestible and good-hearted enough to not want to harm anyone, you can take everyone's projections on to you as truth without even realizing it. Unless you develop a strong, conscious, healthy sense of who you are as a person, you can be gaslit into thinking that you're any amount of the horrible things people project on to you, and that can easily grind you to a confused and babbling halt. Again, take an inventory of who you are and what you want, and grow in size until you can stand in that truth and defend it. Find your will and take it back.

Manipulators particularly use projection as a tactic to hide what they're doing to you in plain sight. A manipulator can have you chasing your tail by simply suggesting that you or others are doing what you are seeing them doing with your own eyes. DNC caught rigging the election? Oh no, it was actually Russia who rigged the election by catching the DNC rigging the election. See what I did there? It's so dumb, but it works.

Here's the key: simply reverse the pronouns. When faced with a manipulator, everything he says about you, he is saying about himself, and everything he says about himself, is what he thinks of you. If he's telling you *you're* duplicitous and *you're* a liar and *you're* trying to take him for all he's got, he's actually saying *he's* duplicitous and *he's* a liar and *he's* trying to take you for all *you've* got. If you have good grounds to believe you are being manipulated by someone, reverse the pronouns in your mind and let them tell you who they are. It works from personal relationships right up to the grand manipulators employed by the plutocrats.

Bring as much awareness as possible to all the ways you're being manipulated, and all the ways you've been inadvertently manipulating. Make it as conscious in yourself as possible so we can all add to the sum of human knowledge as to how

to transcend the manipulations. Once we draw back and fill out to our own individual sovereign boundaries, we will be able to trust ourselves to stand in our truth. We will also be able to see who we can trust so much more easily, and once you know you can trust someone, you can collaborate with them. These newly-conscious and divine collaborations will create the very things we need to solve the real world problems we face as a species and take the will of the planet from the sociopaths and return it to the will of the people.

And that's really all it will take. A tipping point of un-manipulatable and awake people collaborating to create new systems that will surpass the old is all it will take to wrest power from the manipulators who only have the old Biblical tools of fear, guilt and shame to work with. This is doable, and it only needs you.

This commentary was originally published on CaitlinJohnstone.com .

Caitlin Johnstone is a rogue journalist, poet, and utopia prepper who publishes regularly at Medium. Follow her work on Facebook, Twitter, or her website. She has a podcast and a new book Woke: A Field Guide for Utopia Preppers. This article was re-published with permission.
