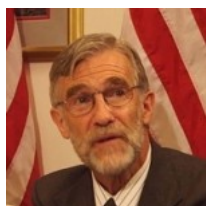


RAY McGOVERN: DNI Nominee Intent on Getting to Bottom of Russiagate

Attorney General Bill Barr will have a new deputy sheriff to go after those responsible for Russiagate, if John Ratcliffe is confirmed as new DNI, as Ray McGovern explains.

By **Ray McGovern**

Special to Consortium News



Shortly before President Donald Trump announced he had nominated Rep. John Ratcliffe (R-TX) to replace Dan Coats as director of national intelligence, Ratcliffe made it clear he intends to hit the deck running on the “crimes” behind Russiagate.

“What I do know as a former federal prosecutor is it does appear that there were crimes committed during the Obama administration,” Ratcliffe told Fox News’ Maria Bartiromo. Mincing few words, he claimed the Democrats “accused Donald Trump of a crime and then tried to reverse engineer a process to justify that accusation.”

It’s an extravagant claim. But it is also true, and the proof is in the pudding of which we should have a steady diet in the months to come.

Ratcliffe sounds partisan speaking of “crimes committed” under Obama. But there could well be documentary evidence to back it up. Some is classified. Trump has given Attorney General William Barr instructions to declassify what is necessary. Barr should be able to count on Ratcliffe, if he is confirmed by the Senate as DNI, to ride herd on those in the intelligence community with huge incentives to cover

their tracks and those of their former bosses.

This may come as something of a shock to new readers of *Consortium News* because of the incessant drivel from corporate media “talking heads” for a full three years now. They are not likely to give up any time soon.

Ratcliffe on Where We Are Now

Ratcliffe told Bartiromo:

“The only place we can get the answers is from the Justice Department right now. The American people’s faith and trust has been shaken in our Justice Department, and the only way to get that back is for there to be real accountability with a very fair process. Again, I have supreme confidence in Bill Barr’s ability to deliver that and at the end of the day ... as long as we know that the process was fair ... justice will be done.”

If Ratcliffe means what he says, his remarks indicate that Barr (a former CIA official and relatively new-sheriff-back-in-town in his second stint as AG) should have in Ratcliffe a no-holds-Barred deputy sheriff, if he takes advantage of him. “Bill Barr has earned my trust already ... that there will be a fair process, with John Durham and Michael Horowitz, to getting answers ... and to provide accountability where it really belongs,” Ratcliffe said.

Barr has ordered John Durham, U.S. Attorney for Connecticut, to investigate how Russiagate got started. And Michael Horowitz, the Department of Justice Inspector General, is said to be almost ready to report on the roles of the DOJ

and FBI in promoting the Trump-Putin “collusion” narrative.

Durham, however, twice essentially covered up for CIA misdeeds. *The New York Times* reported: “In 2008, Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey assigned Mr. Durham to investigate the C.I.A.’s destruction of videotapes in 2005 showing the torture of terrorism suspects. A year later, Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. expanded Mr. Durham’s mandate to also examine whether the agency broke any laws in its abuses of detainees in its custody.”

Abundantly clear in those days, however, was the reality that neither Mukasey nor Holder wanted Durham to deliver the goods on CIA people demonstrably involved in well documented death-by-torture of prisoners in Afghanistan and Iraq. Good soldier Durham uttered not a peep when Holder announced that the Department of Justice “declined prosecution because the admissible evidence would not be sufficient to obtain and sustain a conviction beyond a reasonable doubt.”

But Holder added this: “Our inquiry was limited to a determination of whether prosecutable offenses were committed and was not intended to, and does not resolve, broader questions regarding the propriety of the examined conduct.” The *Times* noted at the time that DOJ’s decision did not amount to “exoneration” of those involved in the prisoners’ treatment and deaths. Does that sound familiar?

Thus, judging from past experience, the question is not so much what Durham will come up with this time around when investigating folks from the same line of (intelligence) work. The more salient question is this: Will Durham’s role be limited by Deep State, gun-shy Trump, or will he be given

the latitude to proceed with no-holds-Barred, so to speak.

Horowitz's investigators, on the other hand, earlier discovered the extremely-damaging-to-the-Russia-gate-yarn text exchanges between senior FBI officials Peter Strzok and Lisa Page, and Horowitz decided to make them public in December 2017. First off the blocks the following day, the late Robert Parry, founder of this website, posted what turned out to be his last substantive [article](#), "The Foundering Russia-gate Scandal."

Horowitz's investigators recently interviewed some formerly reluctant witnesses like Christopher Steele, who had been a paid informant of the FBI itself and whom the Clinton campaign later paid to assemble the infamous "dossier" on Trump's alleged cavorting with prostitutes in Moscow and other scurrilous, since-disproven stories.

With the malleable nonentity Coats as DNI, and with top CIA officials trying to keep former CIA Director John Brennan out of jail (and shield their own derrieres), Barr has – until now – lacked a strong "deputy sheriff" with the requisite prosecutorial skills and courage to investigate the intelligence community to find out where the bodies are buried in Washington. As soon as Ratcliffe is confirmed, Barr should have what he needs to close that gap and tackle full bore the intelligence part of the Deep State's role in Russiagate.

A Parvenu?

But how could Ratcliffe know anything, the corporate media asks, as they paint him as a newcomer, partisan ignoramus and focus on his lack of experience in foreign affairs.

Sorry, Rachel Maddow, in case you haven't noticed, the present focus is on affairs much closer to home. The "parvenu" label will not stick. Serving, as Ratcliffe has, on three key House committees – Intelligence, Judiciary, and Homeland Security – you can learn a whole lot, if you regard your responsibility as oversight, not overlook.

Is there documentary evidence? Admittedly, it would seem a stretch to believe that Obama's top intelligence and law enforcement officials – in "collusion" with the corporate media – would fabricate a Trump-in-Putin's-pocket story line first to try to prevent Trump from being elected, and then emasculate him as incoming president. But, yes, there should be all manner of documentary evidence indicating that this is precisely what happened.

House Intelligence Committee Ranking Member Devin Nunes (R-CA) claimed in early April 2019, "They [the Democrats] have lied multiple times to the American people. All you have to do is look at their phony memos. They have had the full support of the media, 90 percent of the media in this country. They all have egg on their face." The way things are now shaping up, we are likely to learn before too long whether the evidence supports Nunes's accusations.

All the Naiveté That's Fit to Print

The New York Times reported that many Republican Senators, who must vote on his confirmation, are "cool" to Ratcliffe:

"Democrats said on Monday that they were worried that Mr. Ratcliffe would do little to push back against the Justice Department's review of the origins of the Russia inquiry,

for which Mr. Trump gave Attorney General William P. Barr broad power to declassify relevant documents.”

Democrats don't watch Fox News, but does the Gray Lady still harbor hope Ratcliffe might “push back” when he says he will push full steam ahead?

None of the leaking, unmasking, surveillance, DNC-hired “opposition research,” or other activities directed against the Trump campaign can be properly understood if one does not bear in mind that it was considered a sure thing that Hillary Clinton would become President, at which point high-risk, illegal activities undertaken to help her win would likely bring gratitude and perhaps a promotion, not an indictment. But Clinton lost.

After her loss, Comey himself gave the game away in his book, “A Higher Loyalty” – which amounted to a pre-emptive move motivated by loyalty-to-self and eagerness to secure a Stay-Out-of-Jail card. Comey wrote, “*I was making decisions in an environment where Hillary Clinton was sure to be the next president ...*” [Emphasis added.] This would, of course, confer automatic immunity on key players who may now find themselves criminally referred to the Department of Justice.

Worse still, because they all were convinced a Clinton victory was a sure thing, the plotters did not perform due diligence to hide their tracks. And that largely accounts for the fact that there should be documentary evidence – probably even on not-yet-shredded paper, as well as on computer hard drives.

Given his seats on Intelligence, Judiciary, and Homeland

Security, Ratcliffe has seen a lot more of them than most Congress members. In the Sunday interview, he named some of those allegedly engaged in illegalities: former FBI Director James Comey, senior DOJ official Bruce Ohr, and opposition research guru Glenn Simpson. Also mentioned but unnamed were the Obama officials who Ratcliffe said committed a “felony” by leaking highly classified phone transcripts to use against Gen. Michael Flynn, Trump’s short-lived national security adviser.

But Now Running Scared

No one has more to fear from all this than ex-CIA Director Brennan. He eagerly awaited the final report from Mueller, whom Brennan has unctuously praised. Introducing Mueller to an audience at Georgetown University in June 2014, Brennan called him “a remarkable public servant as well as a great friend, a transformative leader, an outstanding partner to CIA, and a source of wise counsel to leaders across the intelligence community.”

In his testimony to the House Judiciary and Intelligence Committees on July 24, Mueller avoided discussing some of the chicanery that bears Brennan’s fingerprints, but he surely failed to “exonerate” him, so to speak. To suggest that the selection of Ratcliffe to become DNI was unwelcome news to Brennan is to state the obvious. Brennan got up early on Monday and at 7:11 AM sent this characteristic tweet – about integrity and subservience, of all things:

Dan Coats served ably & with deep integrity. Ratcliffe showed abject subservience to Trump in Mueller hearings. The women & men in the Intelligence Community deserve a leader like Coats who puts nation first; not a servile Trump loyalist like Ratcliffe. <https://t.co/fbYgS3Mo0M>

– John O. Brennan (@JohnBrennan) [July 29, 2019](#)

Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) has tweeted information from “a high-level source” that it was Brennan who “insisted that the unverified and fake Steele dossier” be given prominent attention in the Russia-gate story.

BREAKING: A high-level source tells me it was Brennan who insisted that the unverified and fake Steele dossier be included in the Intelligence Report... Brennan should be asked to testify under oath in Congress ASAP.

– Senator Rand Paul (@RandPaul) [March 27, 2019](#)

Paul has also [said](#) he thinks Brennan has been “a partisan” and “abused his office in developing the Trump investigation. I think it was done under false pretenses and done for political reasons.”

Paul has been a strong advocate of investigating the origins of Mueller’s probe, including the dicey question of how witting President Obama was of the Deep State machinations during the last months of his administration. Page did tell Strzok in a Sept. 2, 2016 text that the president “wants to know everything we’re doing.”

So What DID Obama Know?

If anyone knows how much Obama knew, it is one of his closest confidants: Brennan. And it was Obama, of course, who commissioned the misnomered “Intelligence Community Assessment” of Jan. 6, 2017, which Russia-gate aficionados have long regarded as Bible truth. As readers of *Consortium News* know, candidate Hillary Clinton and her supporters were

wrong in saying the ICA was the product of “all 17” U.S. intelligence agencies. The leaders of only three – CIA, FBI, and NSA – signed on to it, plus DNI James Clapper.

Months later, Clapper admitted it was “handpicked analysts” from those three who wrote the report. It is a safe bet that Brennan, Clapper, and perhaps Comey picked the analysts. The ICA is such a shabby piece of work that many – including me – suspect that Brennan took a direct hand in writing it.

Ratcliffe would be well advised to take a priority look into the “Excellent Adventure” of that Intelligence Community Assessment as soon as he is confirmed as Director of National Intelligence, and before Brennan, Clapper, and Comey leave town for parts unknown.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. As a CIA analyst, he served under nine CIA directors and seven presidents, for three of whom he prepared and gave the morning briefing based on The President’s Daily Brief. In retirement, he co-created Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

RAY McGOVERN: Ex-FBI, CIA Officials Draw Withering Fire on Russiagate

The Deep State almost always wins. But if Attorney General Barr leans hard on Trump to unfetter investigators, all hell may break loose, says Ray McGovern.

By **Ray McGovern**

Special to Consortium News



As Congress arrives back into town and the House Judiciary and Intelligence Committees prepare to question ex-Special Prosecutor Robert Mueller on July 17, partisan lines are being drawn even more sharply, as Russias-gate blossoms into Deep-State-gate. On Sunday, a top Republican legislator, Rep. Peter King (R-NY) took the gloves off in an unusually acerbic public attack on former leaders of the FBI and CIA.

King **told** a radio audience: “There is no doubt to me there was severe, serious abuses that were carried out in the FBI and, I believe, top levels of the CIA against the President of the United States or, at that time, presidential candidate Donald Trump,” according to *The Hill*.

King, a senior congressman specializing in national security, twice chaired the House Homeland Security Committee and currently heads its Subcommittee on Counterterrorism and Intelligence. He also served for several years on the House Intelligence Committee.

He asserted:

“There was no legal basis at all for them to begin this investigation of his campaign – and the way they carried it forward, and the way information was leaked. ... All of this is going to come out. It’s going to show the bias. It’s going to show the baselessness of the investigation ... and I would say the same thing if this were done to Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders ...It’s just wrong.”

The Long Island Republican added a well aimed swipe at what passes for the media today: “The media went along with this – actually, keeping this farcical, ridiculous thought going that the President of the United States... was somehow involved in a conspiracy with Russia against his own country.”

According to King, the Justice Department’s review, ordered by Attorney General William Barr, would prove that former officials acted improperly. He was alluding to the investigation led by John Durham, U.S. Attorney in Connecticut. Sounds nice. But waiting for Durham to complete his investigation at a typically lawyerly pace would, I fear, be much like the experience of waiting for Mueller to finish his; that is, like waiting for Godot. What about now?

So Where is the IG Report on FISA?

That’s the big one. If Horowitz is able to speak freely about what he has learned, his report could lead to indictments of former CIA Director John Brennan, former FBI Director James Comey, former FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, former Deputy Attorneys General Sally Yates and Rod Rosenstein, and Dana Boente – Boente being the only signer of the relevant FISA applications still in office. (No, he has not been demoted to file clerk in the FBI library; at last report, he is FBI General Counsel!).

The DOJ inspector General’s investigation, launched in March 2018, has centered on whether the FBI and DOJ filing of four FISA applications and renewals beginning in October 2016 to surveil former Trump campaign adviser Carter Page amounted to abuse of the FISA process. (Fortunately for the IG,

Obama's top intelligence and law enforcement officials were so sure that Hillary Clinton would win that they did not do much to hide their tracks.)

The Washington Examiner reported last Tuesday, "The Justice Department inspector general's investigation of potential abuse of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act is complete, a Republican congressman said, though a report on its findings might not be released for a month." The report continued:

"House Judiciary Committee member John Ratcliffe (R, Texas) said Monday he'd met with DOJ watchdog Michael Horowitz last week about his FISA abuse report. In a media interview, Ratcliffe said they'd discussed the timing, but not the content of his report and Horowitz 'related that his team's investigative work is complete and they're now in the process of drafting that report. Ratcliffe said he was doubtful that Horowitz's report would be made available to the public or the Congress anytime soon. 'He [Horowitz] did relay that as much as 20% of his report is going to include classified information, so that draft report will have to undergo a classification review at the FBI and at the Department of Justice,' Ratcliffe said. 'So, while I'm hopeful that we members of Congress might see it before the August recess, I'm not too certain about that.'"

Earlier, Horowitz had predicted that his report would be ready in May or June but there may, in fact, be good reason for some delay. Fox News reported Friday that "key witnesses sought for questioning by Justice Department Inspector

General Michael E. Horowitz early in his investigation into alleged government surveillance abuse have come forward at the 11th hour.” According to Fox’s sources, at least one witness outside the Justice Department and FBI has started cooperating – a breakthrough that came after Durham was assigned to lead a separate investigation into the origins of the FBI’s 2016 Russia case that led to Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s probe.

“Classification,” however, has been one of the Deep State’s favorite tactics to stymie investigations – especially when the material in question yields serious embarrassment or reveals crimes. And the stakes this time are huge.

Judging by past precedent, Deep State intelligence and law enforcement officials will do all they can to use the “but-it’s-classified” excuse to avoid putting themselves and their former colleagues in legal jeopardy. (Though this would violate Obama’s executive order [13526](#), prohibiting classification of embarrassing or criminal information).

It is far from clear that DOJ IG Horowitz and Attorney General Barr will prevail in the end, even though President Trump has given Barr nominal authority to declassify as necessary. Why are the the stakes so extraordinarily high?

What Did Obama Know, and When Did He Know It?

Recall that in a Sept. 2, 2016 text message to the FBI’s then-deputy chief of counterintelligence Peter Strzok, his girlfriend and then-top legal adviser to Deputy FBI Director McCabe, Lisa Page, wrote that she was preparing talking points because the president “*wants to know everything we’re doing.*” [Emphasis added.] It does not seem likely that the

Director of National Intelligence, DOJ, FBI, and CIA all kept President Obama in the dark about their FISA and other machinations – although it is possible they did so out of a desire to provide him with “plausible denial.”

It seems more likely that Obama’s closest intelligence confidant, Brennan, told him about the shenanigans with FISA, that Obama gave him approval (perhaps just tacit approval), and that Brennan used that to harness top intelligence and law enforcement officials behind the effort to defeat Trump and, later, to emasculate and, if possible, remove him.

Moreover, one should not rule out seeing in the coming months an “Obama-made-us-do-it” defense – whether grounded in fact or not – by Brennan and perhaps the rest of the gang. Brennan may even have a piece of paper recording the President’s “approval” for this or that – or could readily have his former subordinates prepare one that appears authentic.

Reining in Devin Nunes

That the Deep State retains formidable power can be seen in the repeated Lucy-holding-then-withdrawing-the-football-for-Charlie Brown treatment experienced by House Intelligence Committee Ranking Member, Devin Nunes (R-CA). On April 5, 2019, in the apparent belief he had a green light to go on the offensive, Nunes wrote that committee Republicans “will soon be submitting criminal referrals on numerous individuals involved ... in the abuse of intelligence for political purposes. These people must be held to account to prevent similar abuses from occurring in the future.”

On April 7, Nunes was even more specific, telling Fox News that he was preparing to send eight criminal referrals to the Department of Justice “this week,” concerning alleged misconduct during the Trump-Russia investigation, including leaks of “highly classified material” and conspiracies to lie to Congress and the FISA court. It seemed to be no-holds-barred for Nunes, who had begun to talk publicly about prison time for those who might be brought to trial.

Except for Fox, the corporate media ignored Nunes’s explosive comments. The media seemed smugly convinced that Nunes’s talk of “referrals” could be safely ignored – even though a new sheriff, Barr, had come to town. And sure enough, now, three months later, where are the criminal referrals?

There is ample evidence that President Trump is afraid to run afoul of the Deep State functionaries he inherited. And the Deep State almost always wins. But if Attorney General Barr leans hard on the president to unfetter Nunes, IG Horowitz, Durham and like-minded investigators, all hell may break loose, because the evidence against those who took serious liberties with the law is staring them all in the face.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. No fan of the current President, Ray has been trained to follow and analyze the facts, wherever they may lead. He spent 27 years as a CIA analyst, and prepared the President’s Daily Brief for three presidents. In retirement he co-founded Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

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RAY McGOVERN: DOJ Bloodhounds on the Scent of John Brennan

With Justice Department investigators' noses to the ground, it should be just a matter of time before they identify Brennan as fabricator-in-chief of the Russiagate story, says Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



The New York Times Thursday morning has bad news for one of its favorite anonymous sources, former CIA Director John Brennan.

The *Times* reports that the Justice Department plans to interview senior CIA officers to focus on the allegation that Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian intelligence to intervene in the 2016 election to help Donald J. Trump. DOJ investigators will be looking for evidence to support that remarkable claim that Special Counsel Robert Mueller's final report failed to establish.

Despite the collusion conspiracy theory having been put to rest, many Americans, including members of Congress, right and left, continue to accept the evidence-impoverished, media-cum-"former-intelligence-officer" meme that the

Kremlin interfered massively in the 2016 presidential election.

One cannot escape the analogy with the fraudulent evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. As in 2002 and 2003, when the mania for the invasion of Iraq mounted, Establishment media have simply regurgitated what intelligence sources like Brennan told them about Russia-gate.

No one batted an eye when Brennan told a House committee in May 2017, "I don't do evidence."

Leak Not Hack

As we Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity have warned numerous times over the past two plus years, there is no reliable forensic evidence to support the story that Russia hacked into the DNC. Moreover, in a piece I wrote in May, "Orwellian Cloud Hovers Over Russia-gate," I again noted that accumulating forensic evidence from metadata clearly points to an inside DNC job – a leak, not a hack, by Russia or anyone else.

So Brennan and his partners, FBI Director James Comey and National Intelligence Director James Clapper were making stuff up and feeding thin but explosive gruel to the hungry stenographers that pass today for Russiagate obsessed journalists.

Is the Jig Up?

With Justice Department investigators' noses to the ground, it should be just a matter of time before they identify Brennan conclusively as fabricator-in-chief of the

Russiagate story. Evidence, real evidence in this case, abounds, since the Brennan-Comey-Clapper gang of three were sure Hillary Clinton would become president. Consequently, they did not perform due diligence to hide their tracks.

Worse still, intelligence analysts tend to hang onto instructions and terms of reference handed down to them by people like Brennan and his top lieutenants. It will not be difficult for CIA analysts to come up with documents to support the excuse: "Brennan made me do it."

The *Times* article today betrays some sympathy and worry over what may be in store for Brennan, one of its favorite sons and (anonymous) sources, as well as for those he suborned into making up stuff about the Russians.

The DOJ inquiry, says the *Times*, "has provoked anxiety in the ranks of the C.I.A., according to former officials. Senior agency officials have questioned why the C.I.A.'s analytical work should be subjected to a federal prosecutor's scrutiny." Attorney General William Barr is overseeing the review but has assigned the U.S. attorney in Connecticut, John Durham, to conduct it.

No Holds Barred

Barr is approaching this challenge with a resoluteness and a calm candor rarely seen in Washington – particularly when it comes to challenging those who run the intelligence agencies.

The big question, once again, is whether President Donald Trump will follow his customary practice of reining in subordinates at the last minute, lest they cross the

vindictive and still powerful members of the Deep State.

Happily, at least for those interested in the truth, some of the authors of the rump, misnomered “Intelligence Community Assessment” commissioned by Obama, orchestrated by Brennan-Clapper-Comey, and published on January 6, 2017 will now be interviewed. The ICA is the document still widely cited as showing that the “entire intelligence community agreed” on the Russia-gate story, but this is far from the case. As Clapper has admitted, that “assessment” was drafted by “handpicked analysts” from just three of the 17 intelligence agencies – CIA, FBI, and NSA.

U.S. Attorney Durham would do well to also check with analysts in agencies – like the Defense Intelligence Agency and State Department Intelligence, as to why they believe they were excluded. The ICA on Russian interference is as inferior an example of intelligence analysis as I have ever seen. Since virtually all of the *hoi aristoi* and the media swear by it, I did an [assessment](#) of the Assessment on its second anniversary. I wrote:

“Under a media drumbeat of anti-Russian hysteria, credulous Americans were led to believe that Donald Trump owed his election victory to the president of Russia, whose “influence campaign” according to the *Times* quoting the intelligence report, helped “President-elect Trump’s election chances when possible by discrediting Secretary Clinton.”

Hard evidence supporting the media and political rhetoric has been as elusive as proof of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in 2002-2003. This time, though, an

alarming increase in the possibility of war with nuclear-armed Russia has ensued – whether by design, hubris, or rank stupidity. The possible consequences for the world are even more dire than 16 years of war and destruction in the Middle East. ...

The Defense Intelligence Agency should have been included, particularly since it has considerable expertise on the G.R.U., the Russian military intelligence agency, which has been blamed for Russian hacking of the DNC emails. But DIA, too, has an independent streak and, in fact, is capable of reaching judgments Clapper would reject as anathema. Just one year before Clapper decided to do the rump “Intelligence Community Assessment,” DIA had formally blessed the following heterodox idea in its “December 2015 National Security Strategy”:

“The Kremlin is convinced the United States is laying the groundwork for regime change in Russia, a conviction further reinforced by the events in Ukraine. Moscow views the United States as the critical driver behind the crisis in Ukraine and believes that the overthrow of former Ukrainian President Yanukovich is the latest move in a long-established pattern of U.S.-orchestrated regime change efforts.”

Any further questions as to why the Defense Intelligence Agency was kept away from the ICA drafting table?

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27 years as a CIA analyst, he was Chief of the Soviet Foreign Policy Branch, and

preparer/briefer of the President's Daily Brief. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Orwellian Cloud Hovers Over Russia-gate

Ray McGovern calls out the void of evidence at the heart of the Senate hearing with Attorney General Barr on Wednesday.

By [Ray McGovern](#)

Special to Consortium News



George Orwell would have been in stitches Wednesday watching Attorney General William Barr and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee spar on Russia-gate. The hearing had the hallmarks of the intentionally or naively blind leading the blind with political shamelessness.

From time to time the discussion turned to the absence of a legal “predicate” to investigate President Donald Trump for colluding with Russia. That is, of course, important; and we can expect to hear a lot more about that in coming months.

More important: what remains unacknowledged is the absence of an evidence-based major premise that should have been in place to anchor the rhetoric and accusations about Russia-gate over the past three years. With a lack of evidence sufficient to support a major premise, any syllogism falls of its own weight.

The major premise that Russia hacked into the Democratic

National Committee and gave *WikiLeaks* highly embarrassing emails cannot bear close scrutiny. Yes, former CIA Director John Brennan has told Congress he does not “do evidence.” In the same odd vein, Brennan’s former FBI counterpart James Comey chose not to “do evidence” when he failed to seize and inspect the DNC computers that a contractor-of-ill-repute working for the DNC claimed were hacked by Russia.

Call us old fashioned, but we Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) still “do evidence” – and, in the case at hand, forensic investigation. For those who “can handle the truth,” the two former NSA technical directors in VIPS can readily explain how the DNC emails were not hacked – by Russia or anyone else – but rather were copied and leaked by someone with physical access to the DNC computers.

We first reported hard forensic evidence to support that judgment in a July 2017 memorandum for the president. Substantial evidence that has accumulated since then strengthens our confidence in that and in related conclusions. Our conclusions are not based on squishy “assessments,” but rather on empirical, forensic investigations – evidence based on fundamental principles of science and the scientific method.

Bizarre, Medieval

All “serious” members of the establishment, including Barr, his Senate interrogators, and the “mainstream media” feel required to accept as dogma the evidence-free conventional wisdom that Russia hacked into the DNC. If you question it, you are, *ipso facto*, a heretic – and a “conspiracy

theorist," to boot.

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Again, shades of Orwell and his famous "two plus two equals five." Orwell's protagonist in "1984," Winston Smith, imagines that the State might proclaim that "two plus two equals five" is fact. Smith wonders whether, if everybody believes it, does that make it true?

Actually, the end goal is not to get you to parrot that two plus two equals five. The end goal is to make it so you'd never even consider that two plus two could equal anything other than five.

During the entire Barr testimony Wednesday, no one departed from the safe, conventional wisdom about Russian hacking. We in VIPS, at least, resist the notion that this makes it true. We shall continue to insist that two and two is four, and point out the flaws in any squishy "Intelligence Community Assessment" that concludes, even "with high confidence," that the required answer is "five."

Doubtful Dogma

Wednesday's Senate hearing brought a painful flashback to a similarly widely-held, but evidence-free dogma – that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction before the U.S. attacked that country. It gets worse: Many of the same people who promoted the spurious claims about WMD are responsible for developing and proclaiming the dogma about Russian hacking into the DNC. The Oscar for his performance in the role of misleader goes, once again, to former Director of National

Intelligence James Clapper, whose “credits” go back to the WMD fiasco in which he played a central role.

Before the war on Iraq, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld put Clapper in charge of analysis of satellite imagery, the most definitive collection system for information on WMD. In his memoir, Clapper admits, with stomach-churning nonchalance, that *“intelligence officers, including me, were so eager to help [spread the Cheney/Bush claim that Iraq had a ‘rogue WMD program’] that we found what wasn’t really there.”* [Emphasis added]

Last November as Clapper was hawking his memoir at the Carnegie Endowment I had a chance during the Q and A to pursue him on that and on Russia-gate. I began:

“You confess [in Clapper’s book] to having been shocked that no weapons of mass destruction were found. And then, to your credit, you admit, as you say here [quoting from the book], ‘the blame is due to intelligence officers, including me, who were so eager to help [the administration make war on Iraq] that we found what wasn’t really there.’”

“Now fast forward to two years ago. Your superiors were hell bent on finding ways to blame Trump’s victory on the Russians. Do you think that your efforts were guilty of the same sin here? Do you think that you found a lot of things that weren’t really there? Because that’s what our conclusion is, especially from the technical end. There was no hacking of the DNC; it was leaked, and you know that because you talked to NSA.”

Evidence

Back to the Senate hearing on Wednesday: Sen. Kamala Harris (D-CA), during a line of questioning about evidence of obstruction of justice, asked the attorney general if he personally reviewed the underlying evidence in the Mueller report.

“No,” said Barr, “We accepted the statements in the report as factual record. We did not go underneath it to see whether or not they were accurate. We accepted it as accurate.”

Harris: You accepted the report as evidence? You did not question or look at the underlying evidence?

Barr: We accepted the statements in the report and the characterization of the evidence as true.”

Harris: “You have made it clear that you did not look at the evidence.”

It was crystal clear on Wednesday that Barr had bigger fish to fry, as well as protective nets to deflect incoming shells. He is likely to be preoccupied for weeks answering endless questions about his handling of the Mueller report. It is altogether possible, though, that in due course he plans to look into the origins of Russia-gate and the role of Clapper, Brennan and Comey in creating and promoting the evidence-free dogma that Russia hacked into the DNC – and, more broadly, that, absent Russia’s support, Trump would not be president.

For the moment, however, we shall have to live with “The Russians Still Did It, Whether Trump Colluded or Not.” There remains an outside chance, however, that the truth

will emerge, perhaps even before November 2020, and that, this time, the Democrats will be shown to have shot themselves in *both* feet.

For further background, please see:

[VIPS Fault Mueller Probe, Criticize Refusal to Interview Assange](#)

[VIPS: Mueller's Forensics-Free Findings](#)

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. He was a CIA analyst for 27 years, with special expertise on Russia, and prepared *The President's Daily Brief* for Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

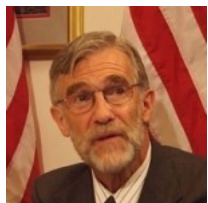
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Ray McGovern: Russia-gate Evidence,
Please

Was former FBI Director James Comey pulling a Hoover on Trump to keep him in line? asks Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



For those interested in evidence – or the lack of it– regarding collusion between Russia and the presidential campaign of Donald Trump, we can thank the usual Russia-gate promoters at *The New York Times* and CNN for inadvertently filling in some gaps in recent days.

Stooping to a new low, Friday's *Times* headline screamed: "F.B.I. Opened Inquiry Into Whether Trump Was Secretly Working on Behalf of Russia." The second paragraph noted that FBI agents "sought to determine whether Mr. Trump was knowingly working for Russia or had unwittingly fallen under Moscow's influence."

Trump had been calling for better relations with Russia during his presidential campaign. As journalist Michael Tracy tweeted on Sunday, the *Times* report made it "not a stretch to say: the FBI criminally investigating Trump on the basis of the 'national security threat' he allegedly poses, with the 'threat' being his perceived policy preferences re: Russia, could constitute literal criminalization of deviation from foreign policy consensus."

On Monday night CNN talking heads, like former House Intelligence Committee chair Mike Rogers, were expressing wistful hope that the FBI had more tangible evidence than Trump's public statements to justify such an investigation. Meanwhile, they would withhold judgment regarding the Bureau's highly unusual step.

Evidence?

NYT readers had to get down to paragraph 9 to read: "No evidence has emerged publicly that Mr. Trump was secretly in

contact with or took direction from Russian government officials.” Four paragraphs later, the *Times*’ writers noted that, “A vigorous debate has taken shape among former law enforcement officials ... over whether FBI investigators overreacted.”

That was what Republican Rep. Trey Gowdy was wondering when he grilled former CIA director John Brennan on May 23, 2017 on what evidence he had provided to the FBI to catalyze its investigation of Trump-Russia collusion.

Brennan replied: “I don’t do evidence.”

The best Brennan could do was repeat the substance of a clearly well-rehearsed statement: “I encountered and am aware of information and intelligence that revealed contacts and interactions between Russian officials and U.S. persons involved in the Trump campaign ... that required further investigation by the Bureau to determine whether or not U.S. persons were actively conspiring, colluding with Russian officials.”

That was it.

CNN joined the piling on Monday, quoting former FBI General Counsel James Baker in closed-door Congressional testimony to the effect that FBI officials were weighing “whether Trump was acting at the behest of [the Russians] and somehow following directions, somehow executing their will.” The problem is CNN also noted that Lisa Page, counsel to then FBI Acting Director Andrew McCabe, testified that there had been “indecision in the Bureau as to whether there was sufficient predication to open [the investigation].” “Predication” is another word for evidence.

Within hours of Comey's firing on May 9, 2017, Page's boyfriend and a top FBI counterintelligence official, Peter Strzok texted her: "We need to open the case we've been waiting on now while Andy [McCabe] is acting [director]." After all, if Trump were bold enough, he could have appointed a new FBI director and who knew what might happen then. When Page appeared before Congress, she was reportedly asked what McCabe meant. She confirmed that his text was related to the Russia investigation into potential collusion.

Comey v. Trump Goes Back to Jan. 6, 2017

The *Times* and CNN, however unintentionally, have shed light on what ensued after Trump finally fired Comey. Apparently, it finally dawned on Trump that, on Jan. 6, 2017, Comey had treated him to the time-honored initiation-rite-for-presidents-elect – with rubrics designed by former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover.

It seems then-FBI Director James Comey rendered a good impersonation of Hoover that day when he briefed President-elect Trump on the scurrilous "Steele dossier" that the FBI had assembled on Trump. Excerpts from an interview Trump gave to the *Times* (below) after the firing throw light on what Trump says was at least part of his motivation to dump Comey.

To dramatize the sensitivity of the dossier, Comey asked then-National Intelligence Director James Clapper and the heads of the CIA and NSA to depart the room at the Trump Tower, leaving Comey alone with the President-elect. The Gang of Four had already briefed Trump on the evidence-

impoverished “Intelligence Community Assessment.” That “assessment” alleged that Putin himself ordered his minions to help Trump win. The dossier had been leaked to the media, which withheld it but *Buzzfeed* published it on Jan. 10.?

‘This Russia Thing’

Evidently, it took Trump four months to fully realize he was being played, and that he couldn’t expect the “loyalty” he is said to have asked of Comey. So Trump fired Comey on May 9. Two days later he told NBC’s Lester Holt:

“When I decided to just do it, I said to myself, I said, ‘You know, this Russia thing with Trump and Russia is a made-up story, it’s an excuse by the Democrats for having lost an election that they should’ve won.’”

The mainstream media and other Russia-gater aficionados immediately seized on “this Russian thing” as proof that Trump was trying to obstruct the investigation of alleged Russian collusion with the Trump campaign. However, in the Holt interview Trump appeared to be reflecting on Comey’s J. Edgar Hoover-style, one-on-one gambit alone in the room with Trump.

Would Comey really do a thing like that? Was the former FBI director protesting too much in his June 2017 testimony to the Senate Intelligence Committee when he insisted he’d tried to make it clear to Trump that briefing him on the unverified but scurrilous information in the dossier wasn’t intended to be threatening. It took a few months but it seems Trump figured out what he thought Comey was up to.

Trump to NYT: ‘Leverage’ (aka Blackmail)

In a long Oval Office interview with the *Times* on July 19, 2017, Trump said he thought Comey was trying to hold the dossier over his head.

“...Look what they did to me with Russia, and it was totally phony stuff. ... the dossier ... Now, that was totally made-up stuff,” Trump said. “I went there [to Moscow] for one day for the Miss Universe contest, I turned around, I went back. It was so disgraceful. It was so disgraceful.

“When he [James B. Comey] brought it [the dossier] to me, I said this is really made-up junk. I didn’t think about anything. I just thought about, man, this is such a phony deal. ... I said, this is – honestly, it was so wrong, and they didn’t know I was just there for a very short period of time. It was so wrong, and I was with groups of people. It was so wrong that I really didn’t, I didn’t think about motive. I didn’t know what to think other than, this is really phony stuff.”

The dossier, paid for by the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign and compiled by former British spy Christopher Steele, relates a tale of Trump allegedly cavorting with prostitutes, who supposedly urinated on each other before the same bed the Obamas had slept in at the Moscow Ritz-Carlton hotel. [On February 6, 2018, *The Washington Post* reported that that part of the dossier was written Cody Shearer, a long-time Clinton operative and passed it along to Steele. Shearer ignored a request for comment from **Consortium News**. [Shearer had been a Consortium advisory board member who was asked to resign and left the board.]

Trump told the *Times*: “I think [Comey] shared it so that I would – because the other three people [Clapper, Brennan, and Rogers] left, and he showed it to me. ... So anyway, in my opinion, he shared it so that I would think he had it out there. ... As leverage.

“Yeah, I think so. In retrospect. In retrospect. You know, when he wrote me the letter, he said, ‘You have every right to fire me,’ blah blah blah. Right? He said, ‘You have every right to fire me.’ I said, that’s a very strange – you know, over the years, I’ve hired a lot of people, I’ve fired a lot of people. Nobody has ever written me a letter back that you have every right to fire me.”

McGovern lays out more details during a 12-minute [interview](#) on Jan. 10 with Tyrel Ventura of “Watching the Hawks.”

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A CIA analyst for 27 years and Washington area resident for 56 years, he has been attuned to these machinations. He is co-founder of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

Brennan and Clapper Should Not Escape Prosecution

Recently declassified documents show that the former CIA director and former director of national intelligence approved illegal spying on Congress and then classified their crime. They need to face punishment, writes John

Kiriakou.

By John Kiriakou

Special to Consortium News



Republican Sen. Chuck Grassley, the longtime chairman of the Judiciary Committee, made a dramatic announcement Nov. 1 that should lead to jail time for both former CIA Director John Brennan and former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper.

As reported, but widely overlooked amid the media focus on the midterm elections, Brennan ordered CIA hackers to intercept the emails of all potential or possible intelligence community whistleblowers who may have been trying to contact the congressional oversight committees, specifically to the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the Senate Judiciary Committee.

Hacking the Senate's computer system constitutes illegal use of a government computer, illegal espionage and wire fraud.

Brennan and Clapper, in 2014, ostensibly notified congressional overseers about this, but in a way that either tied senators' hands or kept them in the dark. They classified the notifications.

As a result, Grassley knew of the hacking but couldn't say anything while senators on neither the Intelligence or Judiciary Committees didn't know.

It's a felony to classify a crime. It's also a felony to classify something solely for the purpose of preventing embarrassment to the CIA.

For all of this—for the hacking in the first place, and then the classification of that criminal deed—both men belong in prison.

This kind of over-classification is illegal, but few Americans know that because this law is not enforced. The Justice Department has never brought over-classification charges against a U.S. spying authority.

But this would be a good place to start.

Brennan has flouted U.S. national security laws with impunity for years. It was Brennan who, as CIA director, ordered CIA computer hackers to break into the computer system of the Senate Intelligence Committee while its investigators were preparing a declassified version of the Senate Torture Report Executive Summary. It was also Brennan who maintained President Obama's "kill list" of people designated for assassination, including American citizens, without the benefit of due process.

Clapper infamously denied to Senator Ron Wyden in an open hearing of the Senate Intelligence Committee that NSA was spying on American citizens. When he was finally challenged on his lie, he said that saying no was "the least dishonest response" he could think of.

There is a strong public interest in [the] content [of the two notifications], Grassley said, adding their content should be released in their entirety. "What sources or

methods would be jeopardized by the declassification of these notifications? After four-and-a-half years of bureaucratic foot-dragging, led by Brennan and Clapper, we finally have the answer: None.”

Grassley began trying to get these two notifications declassified four years ago. The Iowa senator said that during the last two years of the Obama administration the Intelligence Community Inspector General—a monitoring entity established in 2010—repeatedly ignored his requests to release the information.

This time, after the exit of the Obama people, the request was approved.

There is hyper-partisan sensitivity around Brennan, who has publicly denounced Trump and is widely understood to be a leading source in the spy community pressing the idea that the Trump colluded with the Russians’ interference in 2016 the elections.

Partisan passions, however, should have no place in all this.

What should matter is the law and the efforts by these two men to place themselves above it.

The CIA is required by law to inform congressional oversight committees whenever one of its officers, agents, or administrators breaks the law, when an operation requires congressional approval because it is a “covert action” program, or whenever something happens at the CIA that’s potentially controversial and the agency wants to save itself the embarrassment of explaining itself to Congress

later.

“I could see no reason to withhold declassification of these documents.” Grassley said. “They contained no information that could be construed as [betraying] sources and methods.”

Brennan was the leading force behind the prosecutions of eight national security whistleblowers during the Obama administration, almost three times the number of whistleblowers charged under the Espionage Act by all previous presidents combined.

Indeed, I was one of the “Obama Eight.” I was charged with five felonies, including three counts of espionage, after I blew the whistle on the CIA’s torture program. Of course, I hadn’t committed espionage and those charges were eventually dropped, but not until I had agreed to take a plea to a lesser charge. I served 23 months in a federal prison.

Brennan and Clapper think the law doesn’t apply to them. But it does. Without the rule of law, we have chaos. The law has to apply equally to all Americans. Brennan and Clapper need to learn that lesson the hard way. They broke the law. They ought to be prosecuted for it.

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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VIPS Tells Media: Support for Brennan is Not Unanimous

In this memo, VIPS tells the news media that the revocation of John Brennan's security clearance is falsely being portrayed as an assault on the freedom of speech of the deeply flawed, former CIA director.

August 29, 2018

TO: The Media

FROM: Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity

SUBJECT: Support for Brennan Far From "Unanimous"

As former members of the intelligence community, we feel compelled to add our voice to the public debate surrounding President Trump's revocation of former CIA Director John Brennan's security clearance. This action is being falsely portrayed as an assault on Mr. Brennan's right to free speech.

We note that some of our former colleagues, a number of whom have held prominent intelligence posts, joined the protest against the President's actions – a phenomenon that provides stark reminder that the United States intelligence community is not a monolith but rather a collection of diverse individuals with a range of opinions on many issues, including what is right and wrong. We the undersigned veteran intelligence professionals agree with President Trump's decision to strip Mr. Brennan of his clearance.

We also note with irony that several of the former officials protesting the President's action have themselves been associated with significant misconduct. David Petraeus, who was convicted of sharing highly classified material with his mistress/biographer, is a case in point. As experienced intelligence officers, we believe security clearances should be granted as a sacred trust and not simply a permanent entitlement that comes with a high level job.

Anyone who has read VIPS memos knows we have often expressed opposition to this President's actions – as we have to those of previous Presidents – on important substantive issues when the intelligence was faulty.

The issue for us is broader than the clearances of Mr. Brennan. We are appalled by the willful misreading by pundits and much of the media of the nature of security clearances. They are certainly not a constitutionally protected right, but a highly conditional privilege. Its granting comes with personal acceptance of restrictions on speech and association: among other things obligating one-time holders to a lifetime pre-publication review of writings that rely on information acquired in performing their official duties.

All of us signed secrecy agreements and accepted the burden of holding a clearance. We surrendered a part of our assumed right to free speech in service of our country's welfare and safety. Those of us under cover kept secrets from family and friends. We no longer associated freely with foreign nationals; an active clearance carries the requirement to report contacts with them.

Moreover, security classification is provided by Executive Branch authority and is expressed with orders that are subject to change at the will of the current president (the exception to this being the so-called "Q" clearance established by law to protect nuclear weapons secrets, though this is also subject to presidential authority in granting or withdrawing clearance). Federal judges do not have automatic security clearances. Nor do members of Congress. They have access to secret information by virtue of their constitutional office and a presumed "need to know" in order to do their job.

Once a person separates from the intelligence community they can continue to hold a clearance provided they are employed as a contractor working on specific classified programs. There is simply no basis in law entitling anyone to permanent clearance. This includes John Brennan. It goes without saying that individuals who are granted continued clearance out of courtesy to their former high position remain accountable in their conduct, and that the Executive can revoke such clearances at will.

Mr. Brennan's own record is clearly tarnished. When he was Chief of Station in Saudi Arabia prior to and after the bombing of Khobar Towers in June of 1996, rather than uphold the integrity of existing intelligence he went along with the decision to avoid creating problems with the Saudis. After the attack (which was carried out by Saudi elements linked to Bin Laden and Al Qaeda), Brennan helped push the meme that the culprits were Iran and Hezbollah.

As head of the Terrorist Threat Integration Center in 2003, Mr. Brennan failed to give the State Department complete statistics for terrorist attacks. The initial publication of "Patterns of Global Terrorism" in April 2004 touted a decline in terrorist attacks in 2003 as vindication of Bush Administration policies. The publication later had to be recalled and revised when it was discovered that the CIA had left out a month and a half of data. John Brennan

was in charge of that process. Instead of receiving a reprimand, however, he ended up being promoted.

Mr. Brennan has assumed the role of passive spectator in building the fraudulent case to justify the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He has claimed only vague awareness of the CIA's so-called "enhanced interrogation" program. Physical records tell a different story. Brennan was "cc-ed" on "a minimum of 50 memos" dealing with waterboarding and other torture techniques. Senator Saxbe Chambliss noted that Brennan's boss, A. B. "Buzzy" Krongard, told the *Wall Street Journal* that Mr. Brennan had a role in setting the parameters of the program and "helping to seek Justice Department approval for the techniques."

Mr. Brennan also attempted to cover up the truth about the CIA torture. Senator Mark Udall denounced his actions in a floor speech on December 10, 2014, the day after the Senate Intelligence Committee published the Executive Summary of the conclusions of its four-year investigation of CIA torture based on original CIA documents. The investigation not only revealed almost unbelievably heinous practices, but also demonstrated that senior CIA officials were untruthful in claiming that "enhanced" techniques produced actionable intelligence that could not have been obtained by traditional interrogation practices. With strong support from President Obama, Brennan, who was the CIA Director, aggressively fought publication of the Senate report. Here's Senator Udall:

"The CIA has lied to its overseers and the public, destroyed and tried to hold back evidence, spied on the Senate, made false charges against our staff, and lied about torture and the results of torture. And no one has been held to account. ... There are right now people serving at high-level positions at the agency who approved, directed, or committed acts related to the CIA's detention and interrogation program."

Mr. Brennan is now publicly insisting that Russia meddled in the 2016 election. What, however, was CIA Director Brennan saying when the alleged Russian meddling was taking place? Did he warn President Obama? Did he warn the leaders of the Congress? According to press reports Mr. Brennan did brief Democrat Senator Harry Reid on ties between the Trump campaign and the Russian government and Reid then wrote FBI Director James Comey demanding an investigation. However, the chair of the House Intelligence Committee has said he was not given the same briefing as Senator Reid. Introducing the weight of national intelligence into partisan politics, as Mr. Brennan appears to have done in his official capacity, is forbidden activity.

We have all held clearances and deeply believe in the importance of intelligence

officers conducting themselves with professional integrity, particularly with regard to remaining unentangled in party politics. VIPS is comprised of men and women of highly diverse political views, from Republican to Democrat to Independent. We agree on one thing: when a professional intelligence officer obtains classified information they accept an obligation to appropriately report facts without regard to political leanings. This is not about being a Democrat or a Republican. It is about doing the job of unbiased intelligence analysis. That is why VIPS has, over the years, written memos challenging the intelligence basis for policies and decisions of George W. Bush and Barack Obama as well as Donald Trump.

For the Steering Group, Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity:

William Binney, Technical Director, NSA; co-founder, SIGINT Automation Research Center (ret.)

Richard H. Black, Senator of Virginia, 13th District; Colonel US Army (ret.); Former Chief, Criminal Law Division, Office of the Judge Advocate General, the Pentagon (associate VIPS)

Fred Costello (former Russian Linguist, USAF, Berlin Kan Op, TS/SCI revoked in 2001) (associate VIPS)

Bogdan Dzakovic, Former Team Leader of Federal Air Marshals and Red Team, FAA Security, (ret.); 9-11 Whistleblower (associate VIPS)

Philip Giraldi, CIA, Operations Officer (ret.)

Larry C. Johnson, former CIA and State Department Counter Terrorism officer

Michael S. Kearns, Captain, USAF (ret.); Wing Commander, RAAF (ret.); Intelligence Officer & ex-Master SERE Instructor

John Kiriakou, Former CIA Counterterrorism Officer and former senior investigator, Senate Foreign Relations Committee

Karen Kwiatkowski, former Lt. Col., US Air Force (ret.), at Office of Secretary of Defense watching the manufacture of lies on Iraq, 2001-2003

Clement J. Laniewski, LTC, USA (ret) (associate VIPS)

Edward Loomis, NSA, Cryptologic Computer Scientist (ret.)

Ray McGovern, former US Army infantry/intelligence officer & CIA analyst (ret.)

Elizabeth Murray, Deputy National Intelligence Officer for Near East, CIA and National Intelligence Council (ret.)

Todd E. Pierce, MAJ, US Army Judge Advocate (ret.)

Coleen Rowley, FBI Special Agent and former Minneapolis Division Legal Counsel (ret.)

Scott Ritter, former MAJ., USMC, former UN Weapon Inspector, Iraq

Kirk Wiebe, former Senior Analyst, SIGINT Automation Research Center, NSA

Sarah G. Wilton, Intelligence Officer, DIA (ret.); Commander, US Naval Reserve (ret.)

Lawrence Wilkerson, Colonel (USA, ret.), Distinguished Visiting Professor of Government and Public Policy at the College of William and Mary (associate VIPS)

Ann Wright, Col., US Army (ret.); Foreign Service Officer (resigned)

Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS) is made up of former intelligence officers, diplomats, military officers and congressional staffers. The organization, founded in 2002, was among the first critics of Washington's justifications for launching a war against Iraq. VIPS advocates a US foreign and national security policy based on genuine national interests rather than contrived threats promoted for largely political reasons. An archive of VIPS memoranda is available at Consortiumnews.com.

Trump Strikes Back at 'Ringleader' Brennan

At war with current and former intelligence officials since before he was elected, Donald Trump on Wednesday moved to strip Barack Obama's CIA chief of his security clearance, though worse may be in store for John Brennan, says Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News

There's more than meets the eye to President Donald Trump's decision to revoke the security clearances that ex-CIA Director John Brennan enjoyed as a courtesy

customarily afforded former directors. The President's move is the second major sign that Brennan is about to be hoisted on his own petard. It is one embroidered with rhetoric charging Trump with treason and, far more important, with documents now in the hands of congressional investigators showing Brennan's ringleader role in the so-far unsuccessful attempts to derail Trump both before and after the 2016 election.

Brennan will fight hard to avoid being put on trial but will need united support from from his Deep State co-conspirators—a dubious proposition. One of Brennan's major concerns at this point has to be whether the "honor-among-thieves" ethos will prevail, or whether some or all of his former partners in crime will latch onto the opportunity to "confess" to investigators: "Brennan made me do it."

Well before Monday night, when Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani let a small bomb drop on Brennan, there was strong evidence that Brennan had been quarterbacking illegal operations against Trump. Giuliani added fuel to the fire when he told Sean Hannity of Fox news:

"I'm going to tell you who orchestrated, who was the quarterback for all this. ... The guy running it is Brennan, and he should be in front of a grand jury. Brennan took ... a dossier that, unless he's the biggest idiot intelligence agent that ever lived ... it's false; you can look at it and laugh at it. And he peddled it to [then Senate Majority Leader] Harry Reid, and that led to the request for the investigation. So you take a false dossier, get senators involved, and you get a couple of Republican senators, and they demand an investigation—a totally phony investigation."

The Fix Brennan Finds Himself In

After eight years of enjoying President Barack Obama's solid support and defense to do pretty much anything he chose—including hacking into the computers of the Senate Intelligence Committee—Brennan now lacks what, here in Washington, we refer to as a "Rabbi" with strong incentive to advance and protect you. He expected Hillary Clinton to play that role (were it ever to be needed), and that seemed to be solidly in the cards. But, oops, she lost.

What needs to be borne in mind in all this is, as former FBI Director James Comey himself has admitted: "I was making decisions in an environment where Hillary Clinton was sure to be the next president." Comey, Brennan, and co-conspirators, who decided—in that "environment"—to play fast and loose with the Constitution and the law, were supremely confident they would not only keep their jobs, but also receive plaudits, not indictments.

Unless one understands and remembers this, it is understandably difficult to

believe that the very top U.S. law enforcement and intelligence officials did what documentary evidence has now demonstrated they did.

So, unlike his predecessors, most of whom also left under a dark cloud, Brennan is bereft of anyone to protect him. He lacks even a PR person to help him avoid holding himself up to ridicule—and now retaliation—for unprecedentedly hostile tweets and other gaffes. Brennan's mentor, ex-CIA Director George Tenet, for example, had powerful Rabbis in President George W. Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney, as well as a bizarrely empathetic establishment media, when Tenet quit in disgrace 2004.

The main question now is whether the chairs of the House oversight committees will chose to face down the Deep State. They almost never do, and the smart money says that, if they do, they will lose—largely because of the virtually total support of the establishment media for the Deep State. This often takes bizarre forms. The title of a recent column by Washington Post “liberal” commentator Eugene Robinson speaks volumes: “God Bless the Deep State.”

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. During his 27-year career as a CIA analyst, he served under nine CIA directors and seven Presidents. He is a member of Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).

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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Ray McGovern: Strzok Hoisted on His Own Petard

COMMENTARY: FBI agent Peter Strzok may be soon “thrown under the bus” in the ongoing investigation into Clinton’s emails and his alleged role in the Russia-gate investigation, comments Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



If FBI agent Peter Strzok were not so glib, it would have been easier to feel some sympathy for him during his tough grilling at the House oversight hearing on Thursday, even though his wounds are self-inflicted. The wounds, of course, ooze from the content of his own text message exchange with his lover and alleged co-conspirator, Lisa Page.

Strzok was a top FBI counterintelligence official and Page an attorney working for then-FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe. The Attorney General fired McCabe in March and DOJ has criminally referred McCabe to federal prosecutors for lying to Justice Department investigators.

On Thursday members of the House Judiciary and Oversight/Government Reform Committees questioned Strzok for eight hours on how he led the investigations of Hillary Clinton’s unauthorized emails and Donald Trump’s campaign’s ties with Russia, if any.

Strzok did his best to be sincerely slick. Even so, he seemed to feel beleaguered – even ambushed – by the questions of Republicans using his own words against him. “Disingenuous” is the word a Republican Congresswoman used to describe his performance. Nonetheless, he won consistent plaudits from the Democrats. He showed zero regret for the predicament he put himself into, except for regret at his royal screw-up in thinking he and Lisa could “talk about Hillary” (see below) on their FBI cellphones and no one would ever know. One wag has suggested that Strzok may have been surreptitiously texting, when he should have been listening to the briefing on “Cellphone Security 101.”

In any case, the chickens have now come home to roost. Most of those chickens, and Strzok's predicament in general, are demonstrably the result of his own incompetence. Indeed, Strzok seems the very embodiment of the "Peter Principle." FBI agents down the line – that is, the non-peter-principle people – are painfully aware of this, and resent the discredit that Strzok and his bosses have brought on the Bureau. Many are reportedly lining up to testify against what has been going on at the top.

It is always necessary at this point to note that the heads of the FBI, CIA, NSA and even the Department of Justice were operating, as former FBI Director James Comey later put it, in an environment "where Hillary Clinton was going to beat Donald Trump." Most of them expected to be able to stay in their key positions and were confident they would receive plaudits – not indictments – for the liberties that they, the most senior U.S. law enforcement officials, took with the law. In other words, once the reality that Mrs. Clinton was seen by virtually everyone to be a shoo-in is taken into account, the mind boggles a lot less.

Peter Principle

In a text sent to Page on April 2, 2016, Strzok assured her that it was safe to use official cellphones. Page: "So look, you say we text on that phone when we talk about Hillary because it can't be traced." It goes downhill from there for the star-crossed lovers.

Pity Page, who asked for more time to answer a subpoena to testify to the same joint-committee. It is understandable that she would have trusted Strzok on this. After all, he was not only her lover, but also one of the FBI's top counterintelligence officials.

How could she ever have expected to taste the bitter irony that the above text exchange could be retrieved, find its way to the Department of Justice Inspector General, to Congress, and then to the rest of us, not to mention far more incriminating exchanges.

The 'Hillary Dispensation'

There were moments of high irony at Thursday's hearing. For example,

under questioning by Darrell Issa (R-CA), Strzok appealed, in essence, for the same kid-gloves treatment that his FBI and DOJ associates afforded Mrs. Clinton during the Strzok-led investigation of her emails.

Issa: Mr. Strozok, you were part of the Hillary Clinton email investigation, that's correct?

Strzok: Yes.

Issa: And in that investigation, uh, you were part of the decision for her to, uh, and her lawyers, to go through emails that were produced during, uh, you, if you will, during her time as Secretary, go through and determine which ones were Government, and which ones were not, both the classified and unclassified, is that correct?

Strzok: I was not.

Issa: You were not involved at all.

Strzok: That's correct.

Issa: But you're aware of it.

Strzok: I..I'm aware of their statements to us about how they did it.

Issa: And do you think it was ok, uh, for Secretary Clinton to determine what could or couldn't, uh, uh, qualify for her to turn in under the Federal Records Act?

Strzok: I, I can't speak to that. That was a decision, my understanding between her and her attorneys, and...

Issa: Ok, but you were aware that in her production she failed to deliver some items that've now been ruled were classified, is that correct?

Strzok: I'm aware that we recovered information that was not in the material that she turned over. I don't know if it was her failure, the failure of the attorneys conducting that sort, or simply because she didn't have it. I, I don't know the answer to that question.

Issa: So, I bring up something that came up in the previous round. So far, only you have determined what should be turned over from your private emails, that, or your non-government emails and texts, what should be delivered because it was government in nature. You've made that decision.

Strzok: That's right.

Issa: And it's your position that nobody else in the way of a government entity should be able to look over your shoulder, so to speak, and make that decision.

Strzok: That, that's right.

Issa: So you think it's ok for the target – and you are a target – of an investigation to determine what should be delivered rather than, if you will, the government, right?

Strzok: Sir, I am not aware of any investigation of which I am a target, not aware I'm a target of any investigation.

At this point Issa tells Strzok he is indeed a target of investigation by Congress. More importantly, Issa makes the point that the content of the texts exchanged on the FBI phones contained a mixture of official business and personal matters.

So why, asks Issa, should we not ask you to provide similar texts from your personal exchanges, since there is likely to be a similar mixture of official and personal matters in those texts? Issa suggests they likely "would be similar."

Strzok asks if, by "similar," Issa means "commenting on Mr. Trump or Hillary Clinton or anything else political in nature." Strzok then adds, "I don't specifically recall but it is probably a safe assumption."

Uh oh.

Strzok: No Good Options

If Strzok was distracted by texting during the standard briefing on

“NSA Capabilities:101,” he may have missed the part about NSA collecting and storing everything that goes over the Internet. That would include, of course, his private text messages with Page on private phones.

There is, admittedly, a very slim chance Strzok is unaware of this. But, given his naiveté about how well protected the texts on his FBI cellphone were, that possibility cannot be ruled out. In any case, given the high stakes involved, there seems a chance he might be tempted to follow Mrs. Clinton’s example with her emails and try to delete or destroy texts that provide additional incriminating evidence – or get someone else to do so.

More probably, after Thursday’s hearing, Strzok will see it as too late for him to try to cash in on the “Hillary Exemption.” Strzok, after all, is not Hillary Clinton. In addition, it has probably long since dawned on him that his FBI and DOJ co-conspirators may well decide to “throw him under the bus,” one of those delicate expressions we use in Washington. In this connection, Strzok will have noted that last month McCabe asked the Senate Judiciary Committee to give him immunity from prosecution in return for his testimony on how senior officials at the FBI and Justice Department handled the investigation of Mrs. Clinton’s private email server.

If McCabe knows FBI history, he is aware that one of his predecessors as acting director, L. Patrick Gray, famously was left to “twist slowly in the wind” per the instructions of President Richard Nixon’s aide John Ehrlichman, when the Senate Judiciary Committee could not get satisfactory answers from Gray.

Nixon had nominated Gray to lead the FBI after J. Edgar Hoover died in May 1972, but he could never get confirmed by the Senate. Worse still, Gray was forced to resign after less than a year as acting FBI director, after he admitted to having destroyed Watergate-related documents.

Predictable Media Spin

The “mainstream media” remain the main obstacle to understanding what

is going on behind the scenes. It would be easier to forgive them, were not a full-blown Constitutional crisis brewing between the Executive and Legislature branches, as the DOJ and FBI continue to resist Congress's requests for original documents. Former CIA chief John Brennan is also being given space to indulge in pre-emptive rhetoric that he apparently thinks will help when they get to him.

The New York Times reported Friday that "Peter Strzok ... was hauled before the House but came out swinging. ... The embattled F.B.I. agent who oversaw the opening of the Russia investigation mounted an aggressive defense of himself and the F.B.I. on Thursday, rejecting accusations that he let his private political views bias his official actions and labeling Republicans' preoccupation with him 'another victory notch in Putin's belt.'"

The Potomac Times (aka *The Washington Post*) ran similarly laudatory coverage of Strzok – "Strzok testifies amid partisan fury: heated hearing sheds little light as agent fumes at accusations of FBI bias" – and laced its coverage with a defamatory article about Rep. Jim Jordan (R-OH), who led the most aggressive Republican questioning of Strzok.

According to the *Times*, Jordan is "under withering scrutiny as he faces numerous accusations that he knew or should have known about the alleged sexual misconduct of a doctor who worked with the Ohio State wrestling team when Jordan was an assistant coach there between 1986 and 1995." The *Times* goes on to quote House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA): "Well, many people say that he did know and by his own standard, he should have known."

And, sadly, do not look to so-called progressive media for more balanced reporting. For example, *Democracy Now!* Friday morning chose to highlight Strzok's tortured explanation of what he really meant when he told Page, "We will stop" Trump. Strzok says the "we" he referred to was "the American population [which] would not elect somebody" who behaves like Trump. The context of that text exchange, however, makes it clear who the "we" is – or was.

Finally, for those with the courage to dissect and explain Strzok's

testimony to neighbors still drinking Russia-gate Kool-Aid, please note that Strzok's name is easier to say, than to spell. It is pronounced "struck" like "dumbstruck," or – equally applicable in Strzok's circumstances – "Moonstruck." Those watching Thursday's hearing will have noticed that not all members of the House Judiciary and Oversight/Government Reform Committees had gotten the word on how to pronounce what may now become a household word.

Ray McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington. A former U.S. Army officer and CIA analyst, he has closely watched Washington goings-on like this for five decades. Ray co-created Veteran Intelligence Professionals for Sanity (VIPS).
