Questions surround death of journalist Michael Hastings

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Hardly a day after the death of 33-year journalist Michael Hastings in a fiery car crash in Los Angeles, California, police have hastened to declare that there was no “foul play” involved.

The speed with which this declaration was made is clearly an effort to suppress the many questions that have been raised about Hastings’ death. Several media reports have referred worriedly and dismissively to what are invariably described as “conspiracy theories” about the incident.

There is, to say the least, something highly suspicious—and, for some, convenient—about Hastings’ death. The journalist, who wrote for *Rolling Stone* and up to the time of his death worked for *BuzzFeed*, was hated by many in the military and political establishment.

At several points in his life Hastings had received death threats relating to stories. In his book, *The Operators*, Hastings revealed that a staffer for General Stanley McCrystal, whose career the journalist helped end through an exposé, had told him, “We’ll hunt you down and kill you if we don’t like what you write.” Hastings continued in the book, “I wasn’t disturbed by the claim. Whenever I’d been reporting around groups of dudes whose job it was to kill people, one of them would usually mention that they were going to kill me.”

Hastings was a man with many enemies in various powerful government agencies, the military, the CIA, the State Department.

According to Wikileaks, Hastings had been meeting with their lawyer Jennifer Robinson just a couple hours before the crash. They were discussing Hastings’ concern that the FBI was investigating him.

According to his colleague Cenk Uyger, Hastings “was a nervous wreck” over government surveillance of journalists.

The details of the crash itself are still being examined. An eyewitness says that the car was speeding down Highland Ave. in Hollywood, CA at 4:30 AM Wednesday when the driver lost control at the intersection with Melrose Ave. and slammed into a palm tree.

The engine sailed about 100 feet down the street, and the car quickly burst into flames. By all accounts the crash was intense. A local resident said, “It sounded like a bomb went off in the middle of the night. My house shook. The windows were rattling.” On Thursday, the coroner identified the body found in the wreckage as Michael Hastings.

Why was he speeding at 4:30 in the morning? What happened between the time he left the lawyer and the crash? Was he being investigated or even followed by the FBI at the time?

Given the NSA leaks and the widespread surveillance of FOX News and AP Press, it would be surprising if Hastings’ regular coverage of the sleaze, personal thuggishness and criminality that suffuses American politics had not brought him under investigation and subject to regular surveillance.

Beginning with his coverage of the 2008 presidential primaries, Hastings earned a reputation for stepping on powerful toes. His article on that campaign for *GQ* called former New York mayor Rudy Giuliani a “maniac” who would “casually invoke violence and warfare.” Similarly, McCain’s campaign was based on the belief “that they can lie to our faces and we’ll swallow it.” Hillary’s campaign meanwhile employed “cunning racism,” according to Hastings.

The piece that he was most famous for was his 2010 profile of General McChrystal, then commander of NATO forces in Afghanistan. The article revealed a casual derision of the Obama administration among top

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military officers that provided a catalyst for the shift of top command, in which McChrystal was replaced by General David Petraeus, who oversaw the intensification of drone bombings in Afghanistan.

In an April 2012 article in *Rolling Stone* "The Rise of the Killer Drones," Hastings reviewed the use of drones as a tool of extrajudicial assassination. In the course of the article he notes the casual destruction of evidence, and reports that the majority of strikes are not based on targeting "known terrorists" but simply bombing anonymous people engaged in "suspicious behavior."

One of his most recent articles dealt with a former CIA station chief in Algeria. "The Spy Who Cracked Up in the Cold," described the career of Andrew Warren who joined the CIA in 1997 and became deeply involved in torture in various countries across the Middle East and North Africa.

Despite suffering from PTSD and heavily self-medicating with alcohol, valium, and Xanax, Warren was appointed station chief in Algeria. He was removed two years later on charges of sexual assault.

His last article on *BuzzFeed*, "Why Democrats Love to Spy On Americans," published June 7, noted that the revelations of Glenn Greenwald and NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden had exposed the party as a "gang of civil liberty opportunists."

At the time of his death, Hastings was researching a story about Jill Kelley's lawsuit against the FBI and Department of Defense. Kelley claims that those organizations leaked her identity as part of General Petraeus' resignation as director of the CIA last year. Without a doubt there are some people breathing easier now that Hastings is off the case.

Hastings' reporting didn't just put him on the wrong side of the US government, he also drew the ire of other reporters who were more inclined to play "by the rules."

The *New York Times* obituary of Hastings focused on a military investigation into his article on McChrystal that "found 'insufficient' evidence of wrongdoing." Because soldiers were unwilling to formally confirm their quotations to the investigators, the newspaper claimed that McChrystal had been "cleared" by the investigation.

In a biting reply to the *Times*, Hastings' widow, Elise Jordan, noted of the *Times'* characterization: "It is as if a district attorney who had found no witnesses to prosecute a suspected murderer—the only other witnesses being his accomplices—and the Times ran a story headlined, 'DA Clears Alleged Killer.'"

One thing is certain, there is a lot more to be uncovered about the death of Michael Hastings.

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