

The “treason” charge against Donald Trump

Bill Van Auken
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Amid the continuing hysteria and denunciations directed at US President Donald Trump over his meeting in Helsinki with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, the *New York Times* published a front-page article Wednesday titled, “The Word Treason Enters the Debate.”

The article was written by the *Times* White House correspondent Peter Baker, author of two books, one a hagiographic work on Obama titled *The Call of History*, and the other a Cold War-style demonization of Putin, *Kremlin Rising: Vladimir Putin’s Russia and the End of Revolution*. He provides an unintentionally revealing exposure of the sharp shift to the right by what once passed for Democratic Party and establishment media liberalism.

Noting that the treason charge stemmed from Trump’s appearing to take “Putin’s word over that of America’s intelligence agencies on Russian election meddling,” Baker writes:

“Mr. Trump was being accused not only of poor judgment but of treason—and not just by fringe elements and liberal talk show hosts, but by a former CIA director.

“In a presidency without precedent, mark another moment for the history books. While the accusation of treason has been thrown around on the edges of the political debate from time to time, never in the modern era has it become part of the national conversation in such a prominent way.”

For Baker, it seems that the “modern era” must be a short one indeed. Moreover, it would appear that he was not informed that a highly relevant piece was appearing the same day on the inside pages of the US establishment’s “newspaper of record”: an obituary for John Stormer, the author of a book written in 1964 titled *None Dare Call It Treason*.

The book, which played a prominent role in the failed presidential bid by then-Republican candidate Barry Goldwater, summed up and expanded upon the narrative that had been developed by the extreme right wing of American politics, associated for a time with Senator

Joseph McCarthy, that the US government had been largely taken over by Communist agents and “dupes” who were running it in the interests of the Kremlin.

The book’s title page carried a blurb reading: “1964 is a year of crisis and decision. Will America continue to aid the communist enemy, to disarm in the face of danger, to bow before communist dictators in every corner of the earth? The decision is yours.”

This paranoid style is finding undeniable echoes from within the Democratic Party and the *Times* itself. Just two days earlier, the newspaper’s ineffable foreign affairs columnist Thomas Friedman described Trump as “an asset of Russian intelligence,” and issued a similar call to arms: “My fellow Americans, we are in trouble and we have some big decisions to make today.” Last year, the same Friedman used his column to address an open letter appealing to the military officers in the Trump administration to remove the president by means of a palace coup.

The chief authority cited by Baker for his treason article is John Brennan, the former director of the US Central Intelligence Agency, whom he describes as “one of Trump’s most vocal critics.” Brennan denounced Trump’s behavior in Helsinki as “nothing short of treasonous.”

The idea that Trump is an agent of the Kremlin has as much credibility as similar charges leveled more than half a century ago by the likes of McCarthy, Stormer and the John Birch Society against Eisenhower and Kennedy.

The fact that the Democratic Party is resurrecting a narrative associated with the most right-wing elements of the American political spectrum has ominous implications. It can only serve to sow political disorientation among the US population and lay the groundwork for an extremely reactionary and dangerous turn by the American capitalist state.

What is the content of Trump’s “treason”? What is the charge endlessly repeated by the television anchors and talking heads in tones of shock and outrage—the same media stooges who either pass over in near silence or

provide justifications for the Trump administration's torture of child refugees on the US-Mexican border, its war crimes in Syria and Iraq and its support for a genocidal war against the people of Yemen?

It is that Trump has failed to accept the word of the American intelligence agencies. Brought forward as authorities on this supposed "high crime" are a trio of ex-intelligence chiefs who are now fattening their bank accounts as "security and intelligence analysts" for the television networks: John Brennan, Michael Hayden and James Clapper.

What unlikely guardians of the truth! As directors of the CIA or director of national intelligence, all of them oversaw torture, "black sites," "extraordinary rendition" and drone assassinations, as well as other crimes carried out behind the backs of the American people.

Brennan sought to prevent the exposure of CIA torture by ordering the hacking of the Senate Intelligence Committee's computers by CIA spooks. Clapper is a perjurer, who lied to Congress by denying that the National Security Agency was collecting data on American citizens, a lie exposed by the revelations of Edward Snowden. And Hayden, who was also a chief of the NSA, initiated massive domestic spying programs.

Anyone with even a cursory knowledge of history must question the current glorification of these agencies as defenders of democracy against the "traitor" Trump.

In any democratic society, the secret police and intelligence forces of the capitalist state have always been regarded with the greatest of suspicion. Nowhere is this truer than in the US.

Indeed, so great was the suspicion of the CIA that its founding charter barred it from conducting operations within the US itself, based on the recognition that its secretive activities took place outside of the parameters of the law, both national and international.

Dubbed "Murder, Inc." for its organization of assassinations, it also engineered coups against democratically elected governments and installed savage dictatorships from Iran and Guatemala to Turkey and Greece, as well as countries throughout Latin America.

As for the FBI, its record is littered with judicial frameups, provocations and murders. The agency conducted a virtual war against the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement and every section of the American left, flooding organizations with thousands of spies and agent-provocateurs.

These agencies are largely responsible for the twin lies that have been utilized to justify the last quarter-century

of US foreign policy based on unending wars of aggression: "weapons of mass destruction" and the "war on terror."

That expressing skepticism as to the veracity and integrity of the CIA, FBI and NSA can be branded as treason represents a stark warning of the dangers of a US police state.

The other "treasonous" act was the attempt to diminish tensions with Moscow. While Trump views Russia through the prism of his transactional "America First" foreign policy, the predominant factions within the US ruling establishment and Washington's vast military and intelligence apparatus are so committed to the preparation of a military confrontation aimed at carving up and colonizing the Russian federation that no letup can be tolerated.

These are the interests expressed by the Democrats, the consummate party of Wall Street and the CIA. It is unwilling and unable to oppose Trump from a progressive, not to mention left-wing, standpoint because it is the defender of the interests of finance capital and the Jeff Bezoses of this world.

The terms "left" and "right" have ceased to have any real significance within the context of bourgeois politics in the US. The neo-McCarthyite politics embraced by the Democrats express the shift by the entire ruling establishment and its warring factions toward reaction and the destruction of the basic social and democratic rights of the broad mass of working people.

That the same dynamic prevails among the pseudo-left organizations orbiting the Democratic Party was made clear by the reaction of the International Socialist Organization (ISO) to the uproar over the Helsinki summit, where, it declared, "Trump managed to look like a dupe of one of the most transparently evil people on the planet."

All of these political tendencies, reflecting the interests of the more privileged layers of the upper-middle class, are being pushed sharply to the right by the upsurge in class struggle in the US and internationally and the threat of a revolutionary social explosion.



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