

Former CIA Director John Brennan's brief for dismantling democracy

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Following Trump's decision Wednesday to revoke John Brennan's security clearance, the former CIA chief has emerged as the chief spokesman of the anti-Trump faction of the ruling class. It is an altogether fitting position. Brennan embodies the criminality and authoritarian disposition of the military-intelligence apparatus, which is the driving force behind the opposition within the state to the Trump administration.

While Trump is seeking to develop a framework for authoritarian rule—including the cultivation of far-right and fascistic forces based on anti-immigrant chauvinism—there is not an ounce of democratic content in the campaign of his critics within the state and political establishment. In the name of opposing Trump—and the supposed Russian plot that sustains him—they are developing their own arguments for dictatorship.

This is the significance of Brennan's column, "President Trump's claims of no collusion are hogwash," published in the print edition of the *New York Times* on Friday. The pages of the *Times* were turned over to Brennan by James Bennet, the newspaper's highly-connected editorial page editor, brother of right-wing Democratic Senator Michael Bennet and son of Douglas Bennet, a former top State Department official with CIA connections.

In his column, Brennan presents a massive conspiracy theory according to which the Russian government has been able to manipulate and exploit US political institutions to advance its agenda. "Before, during and after its now infamous meddling in our last presidential election," Brennan writes, "Russia practiced the art of shaping political events abroad through its well-honed active measures program, which employs an array of technical capabilities, information operations and old-fashioned human intelligence spycraft."

The machinations Brennan ascribes to Russia are the stock in trade of US intelligence agencies, including those

formerly overseen by Brennan. The Russian "meddling" operation, treated as an established fact by the media, is a fiction. In concrete terms, it consisted, according to the intelligence agencies themselves, of at most a few hundred thousand dollars in social media advertisements, dwarfed by the \$4 billion spent in the 2016 presidential election, most of it paid out by corporations and multi-millionaires. This is combined with the entirely unsubstantiated assertion that Russia helped leak Democratic Party emails that exposed the efforts of the Democratic National Committee to sabotage the campaign of Bernie Sanders and the relationship of Hillary Clinton to the banks.

More than Russia, the targets of Brennan's attack are domestic organizations and individuals. He writes: "Electoral politics in Western democracies present an especially inviting target, as a variety of politicians, political parties, media outlets, think tanks and influencers are readily manipulated, wittingly and unwittingly, or even bought outright by Russian intelligence operatives."

Who are these "politicians, political parties, media outlets, think tanks and influencers?" The answer is: Anyone who does not accept uncritically the narrative of the intelligence agencies and the military, including the lies used to justify war in Syria and aggression against Russia.

The essential problem, Brennan concludes, is that "the very freedoms and liberties that liberal Western democracies cherish" have been exploited by Russia "to distribute propaganda and disinformation, increasingly via the growing number of social media platforms." The Russian intelligence agencies "troll political, business and cultural waters in search of gullible or unprincipled individuals who become pliant in the hands of their Russian puppet masters. Too often, those puppets are found."

The implications of this argument are clear. All social

discontent within the United States is the work of “Russian puppet masters” exploiting “gullible” individuals. If “freedoms and liberties” provide an opening for such operations, then these freedoms must be restricted. To “save democracy,” it is necessary to abolish it.

The pretense of Brennan and his supporters to be acting in the name of “democracy” and “free speech” echoes the claims of a long line of would-be dictators who have employed such arguments in the past. Brennan is himself responsible for countless crimes during his three-decade long career in the CIA. Most recently, as the head of the CIA under Obama, Brennan oversaw efforts to block a Senate investigation into CIA torture, including by spying on Senate staff members conducting the investigation.

On Friday, media commentary focused on a letter released by 15 former intelligence bosses supporting Brennan and denouncing the revocation of his security clearance as “an attempt to stifle free speech.” Among the signatories is Michael Hayden, who headed first the National Security Agency and then the CIA. Hayden oversaw and implemented the NSA’s massive domestic spying programs.

Another signatory is former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, who perjured himself in testimony before the Senate by claiming the spying programs did not target US citizens. Another is retired Gen. David Petraeus, who oversaw US military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and went on to head the CIA.

These representatives of the military and intelligence apparatus have received the full support of the Democratic Party, which is running an unprecedented number of candidates drawn directly from the CIA and the military in the upcoming midterm elections. In response to Brennan’s statements, top Democrats have given their full support or, as in the case of Bernie Sanders, tacitly endorsed his position by maintaining their silence.

Far-reaching measures have already been taken to suppress domestic opposition. Next week will mark one year since the Open Letter by *World Socialist Web Site* Chairman David North to Google demanding that it halt the manipulation of its search results to block access to the WSWWS and other left-wing sites, under the guise of combating “fake news” propagated by Russia.

Over the past year, the censorship measures employed by social media and Internet companies have been vastly expanded. Search traffic from Google to left-wing and anti-war sites continues to fall sharply, including a now

80 percent reduction in traffic to the WSWWS. Measures taken by Facebook have effectively blocked alternative sites from individuals’ news feeds while sharply limiting the spread of viral videos. Late last month, Facebook initiated a new stage in its censorship drive by deleting an event page for an anti-fascist rally in Washington DC held last week.

The source of this unprecedented attack on free speech lies not in Russia, but in the United States. Censorship measures have focused on the Internet because access to social media platforms and alternative sources of news has undermined the authority of the “professional gatekeepers”—the corporate media, which serve as the mouthpieces of the financial elite and its military-intelligence apparatus. Its stranglehold on information, including the blackout of third parties and left-wing and anti-war opinion, is undermined by the Internet.

The American ruling class is presiding over a social powder keg. It knows that social inequality has reached unsustainable levels and that its plans for a vast expansion of military operations will engender mass opposition. It observes with terror polls showing that far more young people have a favorable view of socialism than of capitalism. It knows that any struggle of workers that breaks free of the control of the trade unions—aided by the ability of workers to communicate and coordinate their actions online—will receive mass support and tend to develop in the direction of a general strike.

The initial moves to censor the Internet are only the beginning. The great danger, as the Socialist Equality Party resolution adopted last month states, is that “the conscious preparations of the ruling elites for war and dictatorship are advancing more rapidly than the class consciousness of the working class.” The recognition of this reality requires all the greater determination, the resolution states, “to raise the political consciousness of the working class to the level required by the historical tasks with which it is confronted.” This is the most urgent political task.



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