

Political warfare deepens as Democrats, ex-spies circle the wagons around Brennan

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In a further political intervention by the military-intelligence apparatus, several high-ranking intelligence officials took to the Sunday morning talk shows yesterday to denounce Trump's decision last week to revoke the security clearance of former CIA Director John Brennan.

These included Brennan himself on NBC's "Meet the Press," former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, former Obama counterterrorism adviser Lisa Monaco and former NSA and CIA chief Michael Hayden on CNN's "State of the Union," and former CIA director and Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, who appeared in a taped segment on CBS's "Face the Nation." Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Mike Mullen made an appearance on "Fox News Sunday" criticizing the strident tone of Brennan's rhetoric against Trump, whom Brennan has all but accused of treason, while opposing Trump's decision to retaliate by revoking his security clearance.

The ex-spies all postured as defenders of freedom of speech. "Whether one agrees or disagrees with what John Brennan said is not the issue," Leon Panetta said. "We have something called free speech in this country. And whether you're a former CIA director or whether you're a former President of the United States or whether you're just a citizen on the street you have a right to free speech to say what you think about our country and our President—and that's the right that John exercised."

The claim by these spy chiefs to be defending "free speech" is as grotesque as it is absurd, although it was predictably unchallenged by the pliant corporate media. "Meet the Press" host Chuck Todd was arguably the most sycophantic, at one point interjecting during his interview with Brennan—referring to Brennan's charge that Trump was guilty of treason in relation to

Russia—"When you speak as a former CIA Director, I'll be honest, my ears always perk up more, I think people's perk up more." He followed this up by badgering subsequent guest and Trump lawyer Rudolph Giuliani for daring to question the unproven claims that Trump "colluded" with the Russian government during the 2016 elections.

What they are really defending is the untrammelled "right" of the intelligence agencies to intervene in American politics. Brennan himself complained in the pages of the *New York Times* last week that "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," with the clear implication that democratic norms must be restricted in order to combat "Russian meddling."

In reality, the campaign over alleged and unproven Russian hacking, which began as the means for the Democrats and sections of the state to force Trump into a more aggressive stand against Russia, has expanded into a justification for sweeping acts of censorship, above all against left-wing and anti-war groups.

In the course of his interview with the former CIA chief, Todd asked Brennan, "If you were currently the head of the C.I.A. and the president revoked the security clearance of a former C.I.A. head, what would you do as sitting C.I.A. Director under that circumstance? And what advice would you give to Gina Haspel, the current head of the C.I.A.?" Brennan issued a veiled call for a rebellion by the intelligence agencies against the civilian government:

"I think that's what a lot of these very senior officials are trying to reconcile in their own minds how much they can stay and be governors on Mr. Trump's behavior and how much they cannot countenance at all.

People like John Kelly, his chief of staff, who I know and respect and like so much, John and I worked very close together. I'm sure he's trying to keep Mr. Trump from doing awful, terrible things. But at some point a lot—these senior officials have to ask themselves, are they enabling this continued abusive and reckless behavior or not? And if they feel as though they're enabling it, and they're not having that type of governing influence on it, I think they have to show their displeasure and their unhappiness and leave.”

Brennan claimed that he has not been in contact with “anyone in government” since Trump revoked his security clearance last Wednesday. Clapper, however, acknowledged on CNN that he has had discussion with active intelligence officials in relation to the campaign against Trump, adding, “And I do know there is a lot of angst at the working levels in the I.C. [intelligence community] work force.” Hayden then interjected, adding, “These people are still in government. We don't want to make them vulnerable.”

It is significant that almost no elected officials, and no Democrats, appeared on the Sunday talk shows during the segments on Brennan. The fact that the programs were turned over almost entirely to the representatives of the intelligence agencies demonstrates the degree to which the military and the “deep state” have emerged as a dominant political force within Washington.

However, given the fact that the Democrats' own campaign against Trump is pitched to and articulates the differences that the military and intelligence agencies have with Trump, primarily over foreign policy, the appearance of leading congressional Democrats yesterday would have simply been redundant. Moreover, the Democratic Party itself is an organization that is increasingly staffed by, of and for ex-intelligence and military officers, who have flooded into Democratic primary contests in record numbers.

There is no progressive faction in this struggle between the CIA, supported by the Democratic Party, and Trump. While the anti-Russia campaign against Trump revives the methods of McCarthyism and the extreme-right John Birch Society, which alleged secret Soviet infiltration of the US government, Trump's first political mentor was Roy Cohn, Senator Joseph McCarthy's former chief counsel, a fact which Hayden pointed out on CNN.

Trump's National Security Advisor John Bolton, in an interview with ABC News yesterday conducted from Jerusalem, attempted to redirect the campaign over Russian “meddling” onto the Trump administration's preferred adversaries in China, Iran and North Korea. He declined to respond to a question by ABC's Martha Raddatz that the NSA has “been authorized to conduct offensive cyber operations in response to any kind of election meddling” in the lead-up to the midterms in November.



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