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By Leonard C. Goodman / Independent Media Institute  
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## ***Why It's Time to Declassify the Documents From Trump's Basement***

Whatever your feelings about former President Trump, there are reasons to be skeptical when government officials say it was necessary to raid his Florida home to recover classified documents that threatened national security.

Like the former president, I was once accused by the government of mishandling classified information connected to my representation of a detainee at Guantanamo Bay. There was nothing in my client's file that posed any danger to national security. My client was an innocent shopkeeper who was sold to the Americans back in 2003 when the U.S. was paying bounties to corrupt Afghan warlords to turn in Al Qaeda or Taliban fighters, and then shipping those men 8,000 miles to our newly built prison camp in Cuba. The government decided to classify every document in the detainee files as "secret," not to protect national security, but so it could lie with impunity and tell the American people that the prisoners at Gitmo were the "worst of the worst," and "terrorists" captured on the battlefield.

I never revealed any classified information. I got into trouble after writing an article criticizing the government's practice of classifying certain evidence above the security clearance level of the detainee's lawyer, making it impossible to challenge. Following a hearing at the Department of Justice, I was allowed to keep my security clearance long enough to see my client released back to his home and his family after 12 years of unjust imprisonment.

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I was never in serious legal jeopardy. But the experience opened my eyes to the ways that our government abuses its power to classify information as “secret” to protect its own officials from embarrassment or criminal exposure. Since 9/11, the people most aggressively pursued for mishandling classified materials are whistleblowers, not traitors.

Chelsea Manning and Julian Assange revealed official crimes such as the murder of unarmed Iraqi civilians and journalists. Daniel Hale revealed that our drone assassination program regularly slaughters innocent civilians, contrary to public statements about surgical strikes. John Kiriakou revealed inconvenient facts about our torture program. Edward Snowden revealed an illegal mass surveillance program. All these truth-tellers were aggressively pursued under the Espionage Act. Assange may die in prison for telling the truth about the crimes of our leaders.

While Trump may not fit the mold of a selfless whistleblower, there is still cause for concern. First, the official justifications for the [raid on Mar-a-Lago](#) are highly suspect. Initially we were told that Trump possessed “classified documents relating to nuclear weapons” that he might sell to a foreign government like Saudi Arabia. This shocking accusation has been quietly dropped. Now we are told that the government has [“grave concern”](#) that Trump might blow the cover on “clandestine human sources” described in the mainstream media as the “lifeblood” of our intelligence community. “Disclosure could jeopardize the life of the human source,” a former legal adviser to the National Security Council told the New York Times.

This second justification—to protect sources—is also dubious. The DOJ has been in negotiation with Trump’s lawyers since he left the oval office with his boxes of documents. If the government was just concerned about protecting its informants, a deal could have easily been struck wherein government lawyers would go to Mar-a-Lago and redact the lines in the documents that identify informants without the need for a full-blown raid.

The sudden concern in the mainstream media about protecting informants in order to take down Trump is short-sighted. The U.S. has a long and sordid history of using corrupt, lying informants to launch disastrous policies like the Iraq War. In 2002-03, we were told by Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Powell that the government had [“solid intelligence”](#) that

the Iraqi regime possessed mobile production facilities for biological and chemical weapons. Had ordinary Americans then had access to the intelligence reports—leaked years later, after the disastrous war was in full flight—we would have learned that the [“solid intelligence”](#) about mobile weapons labs came from a single informant named “Curveball,” who had been described by his handlers as “crazy” and “probably a fabricator” and his intelligence as “highly suspect.” Had some brave patriot leaked these reports in real time, millions more Americans would have taken to the streets in 2002 to stop the planned invasion of Iraq.

The media should be demanding more information from our government, especially about its use of informants, and not more secrecy. It is a basic rule of journalism that governments lie, and they often bribe (and sometimes torture) informants to support those lies.

Many innocent men, including my client, were sent to Guantanamo Bay on the word of informants who were bribed with large cash rewards. If these informants are the lifeblood of our intelligence service, then that service should be defunded.

A more plausible explanation for the Mar-a-Lago raid was provided by two high-level U.S. intelligence officials who told Newsweek’s William M. Arkin that [the true target](#) of the raid was a personal “stash” of hidden documents that Justice Department officials feared Donald Trump might weaponize. This stash reportedly included material that Trump thought would exonerate him of any claims of Russian collusion in 2016 or any other election-related charges. “Trump was particularly interested in matters related to the Russia hoax and the wrong-doings of the deep state,” one former Trump official told Newsweek.

This explanation is corroborated by former senior director for counterterrorism Kash Patel, who prepared a key House report that revealed “significant intelligence tradecraft failings” in connection with the Intelligence Community’s Assessment on Russian interference. But the CIA has blocked the release of Patel’s report by classifying it as “secret.”

Kash Patel, who is a current board member of Trump Media and Technology Group (TMTG), began his career in government under President Obama as a national security

prosecutor and later held several positions in the Trump administration. In April 2017, he was picked to lead a team of investigators for the House Intelligence Committee, chaired by Republican Devin Nunes (now CEO of TMTG), and tasked with evaluating the “Intelligence Community Assessment” (ICA) on Russian interference. Although the media touted the ICA as the consensus view of all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies, it was in fact a rushed job completed in the final days of the Obama administration by a small group of CIA analysts led by then-CIA Director John Brennan.

Patel’s team obtained and reviewed the key documents underlying the ICA’s conclusions, and interviewed around 70 witnesses under oath. His demands that intelligence agencies produce relevant documents caused a stir among deep state officials unaccustomed to being called to account for their actions. As the [Washington Post reported](#), “Democrats criticized the unusual direct requests to the agencies” by Patel’s team of investigators. Patel, a former public defender, apparently believed that even the intelligence community should be subject to the rule of law.

In March 2018, Patel’s team produced a report that found serious flaws in the CIA’s Russia investigation and called into question the intelligence community’s key claims that Russia ordered a cyber-hacking and interference campaign to help Trump. The CIA’s response to Patel’s report was to classify it as secret and block its release.

During the next three years, Patel and others, including then-President Trump and Director of National Intelligence John Ratcliffe, pushed for [declassification](#) of Patel’s report on the ICA. But the heads of the intelligence agencies continued to obstruct, claiming that releasing the report “would compromise intelligence sources and methods” and cause “harm... to national security, including specific harm to the military.” Trump eventually backed down.

Then in December 2020, according to the Post, Trump tried to [fire Gina Haspel](#) as CIA director for “resisting efforts by Trump and Patel to declassify” Patel’s report. But once again, Trump backed down and the document still remains under lock and key. Not surprisingly, in its article about Patel’s battle with the intelligence community, the Washington Post sides with the CIA, describing CIA Director Haspel and her colleagues,

who demanded that Patel's report criticizing their work be kept secret, as "[courageous officials](#) who sought to protect the government."

Patel has publicly voiced his frustration with the CIA for blocking release of his report on the ICA. "I think there were people within the IC [Intelligence Community], at the heads of certain intelligence agencies, who did not want their tradecraft called out, even though it was during a former administration, because it doesn't look good on the agency itself," Patel said in an interview. Patel also said he has been threatened with criminal prosecution just for talking to the media about his classified report. The power of government officials to say, 'we have classified your report and if you even talk about it to the media we might put you in jail,' is the power of a despot.

In [an interview](#) with the Grayzone's Aaron Maté, Patel disputed the claim that releasing his report harms national security, noting that his committee released similar reports of its other investigations and "we didn't lose a single source, we didn't lose a single relationship, and no one died by the public disclosures we made, because we did it in a systematic and professional fashion."

For example, in January 2018, Patel authored a report that showed serious abuses by the FBI in the Carter Page investigation, which caused a former FBI lawyer to plead guilty to falsifying information that was used to apply for warrants from the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court. This report criticizing the FBI was released to the public, suggesting that it is still permissible to criticize the FBI, but not the CIA.

Patel's public statements suggest his agreement with Newsweek's report that the true motivation for the FBI raid on Mar-a-Lago was seizing documents relating to the Russia investigation that Trump took with him when he left the White House. In a recent interview with [Real Clear Politics](#), Patel noted that "the same corrupt FBI government gangsters, the same agents that were involved in Russiagate, the same counterintelligence agents that were involved in making the bad false call on Hunter Biden's laptop," are also involved in the raid on President Trump's home, with the intent to make sure the American public never gets the full story on Russiagate.

The saga of the Mar-a-Lago raid sheds some light on the important question of who really

controls what we are permitted to see about the inner workings of our own government. While the sitting president may in theory have unilateral authority to declassify and release information to the American people, the deep state bureaucracy still holds the power to obstruct the president. As one former bureaucrat told CNN, the [process for declassification](#) must include signoff from the agency that classified the information in the first place “in order to protect the intelligence-gathering process, its sources and methods.”

Whatever one thinks of Trump, is it really in the public interest to have a deep state controlling what information gets out to the public? In 1953, the CIA directed a military coup that overthrew democratically elected Iranian leader Mohammad Mosaddegh, and in 1973, the CIA helped overthrow democratically elected Chilean leader Salvador Allende. These leaders were targeted not because they were unfriendly to the American people but because they were unfriendly to international oil and copper interests that wanted to exploit those countries’ resources. And while the people of Iran and Chile knew in real time who was responsible, the American people were kept in the dark for decades until key historical documents were finally declassified.

Many scholars believe the CIA was complicit in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Yet 60 years later, thousands of key documents remain redacted or under seal. President Trump came to office promising to release those records, as required by the JFK Records Act. But deep state bureaucrats opposed the release, claiming it would cause “potentially irreversible harm to our Nation’s security.” [Trump backed down](#), quite possibly recalling the fate of the last president to go to war with the CIA.

It’s not necessary to side with Trump to oppose excessive secrecy. It’s our government. We have a right to see whatever secrets Trump had hidden in his basement. And if government bureaucrats are truly concerned that one of their informants might be outed, they can redact those few lines from the reports. But show us the rest. *This article is distributed in partnership with [Economy for All](#), a project of the Independent Media Institute.*

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