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## A Spy Coup in America?

**Exclusive:** As the Electoral College assembles, U.S. intelligence agencies are stepping up a campaign to delegitimize Donald Trump as a Russian stooge, raising concerns about a spy coup in America, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

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As Official Washington's latest "group think" solidifies into certainty – that Russia used hacked Democratic emails to help elect Donald Trump – something entirely different may be afoot: a months-long effort by elements of the U.S. intelligence community to determine who becomes the next president.

I was told by a well-placed intelligence source some months ago that senior leaders of the Obama administration's intelligence agencies – from the CIA to the FBI – were deeply concerned about either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump ascending to the presidency. And, it's true that intelligence officials often come to see themselves as the stewards of America's fundamental interests, sometimes needing to protect the country from dangerous passions of the public or from inept or corrupt political leaders.

It was, after all, a senior FBI official, Mark Felt, who – as "Deep Throat" – guided The Washington Post's Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein in their Watergate investigation into the criminality of President Richard Nixon. And, I was told by former U.S. intelligence officers that they wanted to block President Jimmy Carter's reelection in 1980 because they viewed him as ineffectual and thus not protecting American global interests.

It's also true that intelligence community sources frequently plant stories in major mainstream publications that serve propaganda or political goals, including stories that can be misleading or entirely false.

## **What's Going On?**

So, what to make of what we have seen over the past several months when there have been a series of leaks and investigations that have damaged both Clinton and Trump — with some major disclosures coming, overtly and covertly, from the U.S. intelligence community led by CIA Director John Brennan and FBI Director James Comey?

Some sources of damaging disclosures remain mysterious. Clinton's campaign was hobbled by leaked emails from the Democratic National Committee — showing it undercutting Clinton's chief rival, Sen. Bernie Sanders — and from her campaign chairman John Podesta — exposing the content of her speeches to Wall Street banks that she had tried to hide from the voters and revealing the Clinton Foundation's questionable contacts with foreign governments.

Clinton — already burdened with a reputation for secrecy and dishonesty — suffered from the drip, drip, drip of releases from WikiLeaks of the DNC and Podesta emails although it remains unclear who gave the emails to WikiLeaks. Still, the combination of the two email batches added to public suspicions about Clinton and reminded people why they didn't trust her.

But the most crippling blow to Clinton came from FBI Director Comey in the last week of the campaign when he reopened and then re-closed the investigation into whether she broke the law with her sloppy handling of classified material in her State Department emails funneled through a home server.

Following Comey's last-minute revival of the Clinton email controversy, her poll numbers fell far enough to enable Trump to grab three normally Democratic states — Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin — enough to give him a victory in the Electoral College.

## **Taking Down Trump**

However, over the past few weeks, the U.S. intelligence community, led by CIA Director Brennan and seconded by FBI Director Comey, has tried to delegitimize Trump by using leaks to the mainstream U.S. news media to pin the release of the DNC and Podesta emails on Russia and claiming that Russian President Vladimir Putin was personally trying to put Trump into the White House.

This remarkable series of assessments from the CIA — now endorsed by the leadership of the FBI — come on the eve of the Electoral College members assembling to cast their formal votes to determine who becomes the new U.S. president. Although the Electoral College process is usually simply a formality, the Russian-hacking claims made by the U.S. intelligence community have raised the possibility that enough electors might withhold their votes from Trump to deny him the presidency.

If on Monday enough Trump electors decide to cast their votes for someone else – possibly another Republican – the presidential selection could go to the House of Representatives where, conceivably, the Republican-controlled chamber could choose someone other than Trump.

In other words, there is an arguable scenario in which the U.S. intelligence community first undercut Clinton and, secondly, Trump, seeking — however unlikely — to get someone installed in the White House considered more suitable to the CIA's and the FBI's views of what's good for the country.

### **Who Did the Leaking?**

At the center of this controversy is the question of who leaked or hacked the DNC and Podesta emails. The CIA has planted the story in The Washington Post, The New York Times and other mainstream outlets that it was Russia that hacked both the DNC and Podesta emails and slipped the material to WikiLeaks with the goal of assisting the Trump campaign. The suggestion is that Trump is Putin's "puppet," just as Hillary Clinton alleged during the third presidential debate.

But WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange has publicly denied that Russia was the source of the leaks and one of his associates, former British Ambassador to Uzbekistan Craig Murray, has suggested that the DNC leak came from a "disgruntled" Democrat upset with the DNC's sandbagging of the Sanders campaign and that the Podesta leak came from the U.S. intelligence community.

Although Assange recently has sought to muzzle Murray's public comments – out of apparent concern for protecting the identity of sources – Murray offered possibly his most expansive account of the sourcing during a podcast interview with Scott Horton on Dec. 13.

Murray, who became a whistleblower himself when he protested Britain's tolerance of human rights abuses in Uzbekistan, explained that he consults with Assange and cooperates with WikiLeaks "without being a formal member of the structure."

But he appears to have undertaken a mission for WikiLeaks to contact one of the sources (or a representative) during a Sept. 25 visit to Washington where he says he met with a person in a wooded area of American University. At the time, Murray was at American University participating in an awards ceremony for former CIA officer John Kiriakou who was being honored by a group of former Western intelligence officials, the Sam Adams Associates, named for the late Vietnam War-era CIA analyst and whistleblower Sam Adams.

Former CIA analyst Ray McGovern, a founder of the Sam Adams group, told me that Murray was "m-c-ing" the event but then slipped away, skipping a reception that followed the award ceremony.

### **Reading Between Lines**

Though Murray has declined to say exactly what the meeting in the woods was about, he may have been passing along messages about ways to protect the source from possible retaliation, maybe even an extraction plan if the source was in some legal or physical danger.

Murray has disputed a report in London's Daily Mail that he was receiving a batch of the leaked Democratic emails. "The material, I think, was already safely with WikiLeaks before I got there in September," Murray said in the interview with Scott Horton. "I had a small role to play."

Murray also suggested that the DNC leak and the Podesta leak came from two different sources, neither of them the Russian government.

"The Podesta emails and the DNC emails are, of course, two separate things and we shouldn't conclude that they both have the same source," Murray said. "In both cases we're talking of a leak, not a hack, in that the person who was responsible for getting that information out had legal access to that information."

Reading between the lines of the interview, one could interpret Murray's comments as suggesting that the DNC leak came from a Democratic source and that the Podesta leak came from someone inside the U.S. intelligence community, which may have been monitoring John Podesta's emails because the Podesta Group, which he founded with his brother Tony, served as a registered "foreign agent" for Saudi Arabia.

"John Podesta was a paid lobbyist for the Saudi government," Murray noted. "If the American security services were not watching the communications of the Saudi government's paid lobbyist in Washington, then the American security services would not be doing their job. ... His communications are going to be of interest to a great number of other security services as well."

### **Leak by Americans**

Scott Horton then asked, "Is it fair to say that you're saying that the Podesta leak came from inside the intelligence services, NSA [the electronic spying National Security Agency] or another agency?"

"I think what I said was certainly compatible with that kind of interpretation, yeah," Murray responded. "In both cases they are leaks by Americans."

In reference to the leak of the DNC emails, Murray noted that "Julian Assange took very close interest in the death of Seth Rich, the Democratic staff member" who had worked for the DNC on voter databases and was shot and killed on July 10 near his Washington, D.C., home.

Murray continued, "WikiLeaks offered a \$20,000 reward for information leading to the capture of his killers. So, obviously there are suspicions there about what's happening and things are somewhat murky. I'm not saying – don't get me wrong – I'm not saying that he was the source of the [DNC] leaks. What I'm saying is that it's probably not an unfair indication to draw that WikiLeaks believes that he may have been killed by someone who thought he was the source of the leaks ... whether correctly or incorrectly."

Though acknowledging that such killings can become grist for conspiracy buffs, Murray added: “But people do die over this sort of stuff. There were billions of dollars – literally billions of dollars – behind Hillary Clinton’s election campaign and those people have lost their money.

“You have also to remember that there’s a big financial interest – particularly in the armaments industry – in a bad American relationship with Russia and the worse the relationship with Russia is the larger contracts the armaments industry can expect especially in the most high-tech high-profit side of fighter jets and missiles and that kind of thing.

“And Trump has actually already indicated he’s looking to make savings on the defense budget particularly in things like fighter [jet] projects. So, there are people standing to lose billions of dollars and anybody who thinks in that situation bad things don’t happen to people is very naïve.”

### **An Intelligence Coup?**

There’s another possibility in play here: that the U.S. intelligence community is felling a number of birds with one stone. If indeed U.S. intelligence bigwigs deemed both Clinton and Trump unfit to serve as President – albeit for different reasons – they could have become involved in leaking at least the Podesta emails to weaken Clinton’s campaign, setting the candidate up for the more severe blow from FBI Director Comey in the last week of the campaign.

Then, by blaming the leaks on Russian President Putin, the U.S. intelligence leadership could set the stage for Trump’s defeat in the Electoral College, opening the door to the elevation of a more traditional Republican. However, even if that unlikely event – defeating Trump in the Electoral College – proves impossible, Trump would at least be weakened as he enters the White House and thus might not be able to move very aggressively toward a détente with Russia.

Further, the Russia-bashing that is all the rage in the mainstream U.S. media will surely encourage the Congress to escalate the New Cold War, regardless of Trump’s desires, and thus ensure plenty more money for both the intelligence agencies and the military contractors.

Official Washington’s “group think” holding Russia responsible for the Clinton leaks does draw some logical support from the near certainty that Russian intelligence has sought to penetrate information sources around both Clinton and Trump. But the gap between the likely Russian hacking efforts and the question of who gave the email information to WikiLeaks is where mainstream assumptions may fall down.

As ex-Ambassador Murray has said, U.S. intelligence was almost surely keeping tabs on Podesta’s communications because of his ties to Saudi Arabia and other foreign governments. So, the U.S. intelligence community represents another suspect in the case of who leaked those emails to WikiLeaks. It would be a smart play, reminiscent of the convoluted spy tales of John LeCarré, if U.S. intelligence officials sought to cover their own tracks by shifting suspicions onto the Russians.

But just the suspicion of the CIA joining the FBI and possibly other U.S. intelligence agencies to intervene in the American people's choice of a president would cause President Harry Truman, who launched the CIA with prohibitions against it engaging in domestic activities, and Sen. Frank Church, who investigated the CIA's abuses, to spin in their graves.