

U.S. Intelligence Institutionally Politicized Toward Democrats

Former CIA analyst says agencies dominated by liberals who use agencies to attack citizens they disagree with

 [Former CIA director John Brennan](#)

Former CIA director John Brennan / Getty Images

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The CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies have become bastions of political liberals and the pro-Democratic Party views of intelligence personnel have increased under President Donald Trump, according to a journal article by a former CIA analyst.

John Gentry, who spent 12 years as a CIA analyst, criticized former senior intelligence leaders, including CIA Director John Brennan, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, and former deputy CIA director Michael Morell, along with former analyst Paul Pillar, for breaking decades-long prohibitions of publicly airing their liberal political views in attacking Trump.

The institutional bias outlined in a lengthy article in the quarterly *International Journal of Intelligence and Counterintelligence* risks undermining the role of intelligence in support of government leaders charged with making policy decisions.

Gentry stopped short of saying the widespread liberal bias of intelligence officials has influenced intelligence reports and products. However, he concludes that "bias may have crept into CIA analyses."

"A considerable body of evidence, much of it fragmentary, indicates that many CIA people have left-leaning political preferences, but less evidence shows that political bias influences CIA analyses," Gentry concludes.

In the past, intelligence politicization was defined as either skewing intelligence to fit biases or manipulating intelligence by those outside the intelligence community.

"But in 2016 observers of U.S. intelligence began to wonder if the CIA's once-firm prohibition on partisan politics had changed, and to ponder whether a new kind of politicization had arisen: namely, institutionally embedded, partisan bias," Gentry wrote.

Gentry points to the activities of senior retired intelligence officials during the 2016 campaign that "universally" criticized

then-candidate Trump and supported Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton.

"The attacks on Trump were unprecedented for intelligence officers in their substance, tone, and volume," he stated. "Critics went far beyond trying to correct Trump's misstatements about U.S. intelligence; they attacked him as a human being."

Gentry, currently a professor at Georgetown and Columbia Universities, provides a detailed analysis of whether the 16-agency U.S. intelligence community and the CIA in particular have become institutional partisans supporting the Democratic Party.

He reached no definitive conclusion on whether intelligence reports and activities were politicized and found no proof "intelligence products have been politicized to mislead or to avoid helping President Trump."

CIA spokesmen did not return emails seeking comment.

The article was written before the conclusions of the investigative report on Russian collusion by special counsel Robert Mueller were made public by Attorney General William Barr, who told Congress the Trump campaign was spied on by the U.S. government.

The Justice Department is investigating whether the FBI and senior officials acted properly in launching a counterintelligence investigation of ties between President Trump and Russia based on information contained in a Democratic Party-funded dossier.

Gentry said in an interview that he has not seen any movement within the intelligence community to address the institutional politicization. "My guess is the issue is not going to go away," he said.

Unprecedented partisan attacks

Recent books by Clapper and Michael Hayden, a former CIA and NSA director, appeared to justify political attacks on Trump based on both former officials' claims that the president has adopted a different world view. "For senior former intelligence officials to make such blatantly partisan statements is unprecedented," Gentry said.

Gentry wrote that further investigation is needed into whether there is a liberal political institutional bias at CIA, because if such bias exists it would damage the agency's ability to carry out its primary missions of defending against threats and supporting senior leaders in making policy decisions.

Unless the questions about bias are answered, Republicans may trust CIA less and give the agency a smaller role. For Democrats, the bias will lead to using the CIA as a tool to support its liberal agenda.

Also, political bias creates new questions about whether CIA can provide objective intelligence analysis—a core institutional ethic.

Regarding Morell, a career analyst who endorsed Clinton, Gentry criticized Morell's opinion article in the *New York Times* during the 2016 campaign that said his intelligence training had taught him that the nation would be safer with Clinton as president.

"Morell's claim that his CIA career qualifies him to make political judgments about domestic issues is incorrect," Gentry said. "He was trained and authorized to 'make the call' about foreign intelligence issues within the classified, internal world of the U.S. government ... He did not recommend policies, including voting choices."

Intelligence officers, like many in the military, rely on former officials to express their views publicly. That has been the case with Clapper and Brennan, who have attacked Trump repeatedly.

Other former intelligence officials, including former national intelligence officer Paul Pillar and former deputy director for intelligence John McLaughlin also appeared in left-leaning news media—*New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and MSNBC—to bash the president.

Gentry said the criticism violated an unwritten rule for intelligence officials in the past to hide their opinions. "The CIA's ethic calls for intelligence professionals to work objectively for all agency heads and presidents, regardless of their political views," he said.

Bias in analyses can be found in intelligence managers who control final assessments and reports that are the main products of intelligence agencies.

"Managers' biases camouflaged as organizational norms and biases in promotion decisions are hard to spot but are omnipresent," Gentry said.

Gentry also notes that criticism of Trump by current and former officials contrasts sharply from intelligence officials' responses to

criticism from Democratic presidents, such as Bill Clinton or Barack Obama.

Former House Intelligence Committee chairman Pete Hoekstra was quoted as saying he was told by CIA station chiefs "every time I went anywhere" the Obama administration was "throwing them under the bus" regarding past harsh interrogation of terrorists.

NSA officials also were "hung out to dry" by the Obama administration following the leaks by renegade contractor Edward Snowden.

Yet, unlike Trump, these intelligence officials did not speak out publicly or leak against Obama or Clinton to the extent that has been seen recently.

"In the past, intelligence officials usually bit their tongues when presidents criticized their work, recognizing that they sometimes make mistakes, that they work for presidents in an unequal relationship, that their job is to help all administrations succeed and even on occasion to be scapegoats for political leaders' failed policies," Gentry said. "That said, some intelligence officers have long leaked information to the press."

Leaks have increased sharply in an apparent bid to undermine Trump, and Gentry said a long-held prohibition against discussing partisan politics in the office has been set aside. Anti-Trump conversations are common in CIA analytical units, and anti-Trump analysts also express their political views on Facebook.

A politicized workforce

Politicization during the Obama administration also was evident at the Pentagon's Defense Intelligence Agency, long criticized for its shortcomings in intelligence analysis and reporting on China's military. According to Gentry, under Obama, editors of the DIA's primary current intelligence report were notified to "avoid specifically identified terms that might trigger criticism of administration policy."

"That clearly stated policy of politicization provoked no apparent reaction of any sort from analysts," Gentry said. "DIA analysts seemed comfortable with politicization by omission."

Gentry challenged the claims of former senior intelligence analyst Thomas Fingar who asserted that annual surveys found very few cases of attempted politicization.

"That's fine, but the survey data Fingar cited are a decade old and presumably report only overt cases of politicization, not those produced by organizational cultural norms, including politicization by omission," he stated.

A chart produced by Gentry based on political contributions by known intelligence officials revealed that in 2016, 61.3 percent of all contributions were made to Democrats.

Gentry speculates the politicized intelligence work force may have been the result of the large influx of young and inexperienced personnel after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

"As is well documented, young people collectively are more left-leaning than other demographic groups," he said. "They have recently been in colleges and universities, some of which have

become conspicuously illiberal through the strongly leftist outlooks of their faculty and administrators."

Racial and other diversity programs also contributed to the politicization. This led to "demographic, not intellectual, diversity becoming a dominant focus of IC leaders."

The so-called anti-Trump "resistance" by Democrats refusing to deal with Trump on any issue also contributed to the problem with intelligence officials joining the Deep State. "This attitude is incompatible with a core principle of established democracies, the acceptance of a change in power after losing an election," Gentry said.

"In the United States and elsewhere, liberals during the Cold War years often worried that unaccountable intelligence and security agencies were running amok. Now, 'progressives' welcome an ideologically center-left 'deep state,' built in part upon policies like Obama's as a check on Trump and conservatives are complaining."

An example was former CIA director Brennan's announcement in July 2017—six months after leaving office—that CIA officers had an obligation to "refuse to carry out" Trump administration orders if Trump fired Mueller. Brennan further decried Trump as unstable.

Gentry urged intelligence agencies to conduct more research on the problem and take steps to correct it.

"The U.S. government has traditionally and wisely declined to ask its job applicants and civil service employees about their political affiliations but President Obama, especially, got around the

policy by mandating hiring from demographic groups known to be generally pro-Democratic," he said.

"Affirmative action' programs may therefore merit reconsideration. Another avenue for exploration is the attempt by some major technology firms that have developed leftist, intolerant corporate cultures to re-introduce intellectual diversity. Thus, the challenge at the CIA, too, may be to reform how analysts think, not just how they act."

Several former intelligence and executive branch officials agreed with Gentry.

Kenneth deGraffenreid, former White House National Security Council intelligence director in the Reagan administration, said Gentry provided an excellent summary of CIA politicization that "confirms what those of us who have been working for intelligence reform have observed on a daily basis."

"Politicization of intelligence begins when the work of the massive intelligence bureaucracy deviates from the focused definition of intelligence—the gathering and interpretation of foreign secrets," deGraffenreid said. "Today the IC and especially the CIA jealously envision themselves as the purveyors of all foreign policy wisdom. In this role it does not welcome other opinions and believes that U.S. officials should limit their reading and thinking to the CIA-provided intelligence analysis."

The proper role of intelligence is perverted further when some in the intelligence bureaucracy believe their role is to provide a check on the actions of elected leaders and see their job as figuratively "poking a finger in the policymaker's eye," he said.

"It will not be easy to fix this corruption of intelligence but it can begin by restricting the IC to the gathering and interpretation of foreign secrets," deGraffenreid said.

A threat to the republic

Charles "Sam" Faddis, a former CIA operations officer, said countering politicization is a critical question. "A secret service that involves itself in partisan politics is a threat to the republic," Faddis said.

"Do I think CIA officers as a whole are guilty of taking sides or slanting analysis? No. Do I think we have seen senior CIA officers guilty of using their positions to favor the Democratic Party? Beyond a doubt, and I'm not sure they're all former officers," he added.

Another former CIA operations officer, Brad Johnson, said just as the State Department has been prone to liberal political bias "the same goes for the CIA in this day and age."

"From Trump's election to this date, a common topic of conversation in the hallways of CIA headquarters at Langley is how best to 'resist' with no fear of backlash and no recognition of just how wrong it is," said Johnson, head of the group Americans for Intelligence Reform.

"It even appears more likely with each passing day that a former CIA director was directly involved in a plot to overturn a legally elected U.S. president, which certainly seems to define treason. I am greatly saddened to say that while reforms to the intelligence sector are desperately needed, I don't think it can be fixed anymore with who is there."

Former Pentagon policymaker Michael Pillsbury, author of the book on China *The Hundred Year Marathon*, said the conclusion of his book implies that the President Intelligence Advisory Board should conduct a review of significant intelligence failures on China even if none have yet been reported to congressional oversight committees.

Pillsbury says there are "at least eight of these significant failures."

"If the cause has been systematic bias based on politicization, that is all the more reason for the review to be conducted by the White House itself, not retirees from the intelligence community," he said.

William C. Triplett, a former CIA officer, said one of the more egregious examples of politicization were comments in 2016 by Hayden, who on MSNBC stated Trump if elected would start World War III. "About ten days later he organized one of the more vicious 'Never Trump' letters" of former officials opposed to Trump.