

Musical Chairs in the White House

On the job training in the intelligence community

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

*Here in the Land of Oz, otherwise known as Washington, one continues to run into people who should know better who insist that they have a friend in the White House who confirms that **President Donald Trump** is really a man of peace being obstructed as he seeks to withdraw the United States from senseless wars in Asia. They argue that the Deep State or Establishment, to include the media, are so blinded by Trump Derangement Syndrome that they cannot get behind his policies even when they would be good for Americans.*

The problem with that argument is that there have been clear instances when the president could have followed through on pledges to reduce troop levels or withdraw completely from war zones before reversing himself and doubling down rather than doing the right thing. One need only cite the increases in numbers of combatants in both the Middle East and Afghanistan and the reversal of an initial decision to stage a complete withdrawal from Syria which instead turned into a move to occupy the country's oil fields.

Others might argue that Trump reveals himself through his quixotic decision making and his willingness to play brinkmanship with powerful opponents as if he were upping the ante over a real estate transaction. Withdrawing with the JCPOA nuclear agreement with Iran was a major blunder, recognized as such by nearly every country in the world with the usual exception of Israel, while Trump's repeated offers to talk with the Ayatollah reflect willful ignorance of Iranian political dynamics. The White House apparently considered the assassination of an Iranian Major General to be an inducement to the Persians to come to the table to discuss a broad range of disagreements.

To be sure, there has been a concerted effort to destroy the Trump administration which started even before it came into being, a conspiracy that has included a number of key players in the national security structure, to include the Directors of both CIA and the FBI. And Trump has a right to be angered by the ridiculous impeachment "process," initiated by a Democratic Party that has still not figured out why the unspeakable Hillary Clinton lost in 2016.

But Donald Trump has also been his own worst enemy, playing into the hands of his critics, with his divisive tweets, his constant search for subversion within and outside his own party's ranks, and his highly offensive language and demeanor. It is hard to imagine that anyone can take pleasure from such an overly-sensitive and essentially ignorant snake oil salesman actually being president of the United States, but there you have it.

And Trump will long be remembered as a president who could not put his own house in order, presiding over a musical chairs arrangement whereby senior officers in his administration were appointed and removed at a whim, often based on "loyalty." In such an arrangement, the sycophants inevitably rise to the top. Even John Bolton, protégé of party

funder Sheldon Adelson, apparently did not suck up enough and was replaced by Robert O'Brien, who did not have any relevant experience qualifying for the job. Prior to his becoming National Security Advisor O'Brien featured in a taxpayer funded trip to Stockholm to obtain the release of rapper ASAP Rocky, who had been arrested after getting involved in a fist fight. O'Brien had orders to threaten unspecified retaliation against the Swedish government if it did not accede to White House demands. That exercise in international bullying means that O'Brien is quintessentially Trump's kind of guy. He has written a book entitled [While America Slept: Restoring American Leadership to a World in Crisis](#), calling on the United States to end any "appeasement and retreat," and has described the basically defunct nuclear agreement with Iran, in predictable neocon fashion, as a repeat of 1938, Hitler and Munich.

And there is always **Secretary of State Mike Pompeo**, who, like his boss, has discovered that there is no lie, no matter how preposterous, that is not worth repeating. Nazi propagandist **Joseph Goebbels** promoted a similar approach back in 1939, [saying](#)

"It would not be impossible to prove with sufficient repetition and a psychological understanding of the people concerned that a square is in fact a circle. They are mere words, and words can be molded until they clothe ideas and disguise."

Donald Trump's latest appointment, guided purely by malevolence, is, however, in another category completely, even in an administration where bullheaded ignorance is considered a virtue. **Rick Grenell**, currently the United States Ambassador to the Federal Republic of Germany, is completely unqualified to be Director of National Intelligence (DNI), where he would be the nominal head of the entire intelligence community (IC), 17 organizations including the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency and National Reconnaissance Office. Just as Grenell had no qualification beyond loyalty to become an ambassador, he will undoubtedly continue in that vein as DNI. Among the Office of National Intelligence (ONI) responsibilities is the briefing of the president on national security related issues.

The appointment of Grenell is as an interim "acting" director for a term of six months because even Trump knows that he could never be approved by the Senate in the normal fashion. Even though Grenell has limited access to intelligence product as a consumer while ambassador, he has no experience as an intelligence officer at any level, nor has he ever been in charge of any large government bureaucracy. He was the communications director for the American ambassador to the U.N. under George W. Bush, and, since May 2018, has served as ambassador to Germany. Given his lack of experience, Grenell will be unable to provide objective intelligence and will instead emphasize briefing on information that supports the president's policies while also cheerleading for those very policies. That is precisely what Trump would expect from a DNI.

In truth, Richard Grenell has been a ghastly ambassador, even by the low standards set by the Trump State Department. Reportedly inclined to ignore the advice of his professional Foreign Service staff, he is a non-German speaking protégé of National Security Adviser John Bolton who would seem to have enough on his plate defending the unpopular Trump Administration decisions on climate change, the Iran nuclear deal, NATO spending, the Nord Stream-2 Russian gas pipeline project and on tariffs directed against European Union

exports, but he has apparently gone out of his way to make the bilateral relationship with a key ally even worse. After the White House withdrew from the Iran agreement, Grenell [tweeted](#) that German businesses should “wind down operations immediately” in Iran. The ineptly worded advice was inevitably taken by the Germans as a threat.

Nils Schmid, a German Social Democratic Party foreign policy spokesman, goes so far as [to say that](#)

“He does not understand what the role of an ambassador should be. An ambassador is a bridge-builder who explains how American politics works, how the American government works, and at the same time explains to America how Germany sees things.”

Grenell has, however, “defined his role for himself, and it is not the traditional role of an ambassador. ... He [works] as a propagandist [for Donald Trump]”

The *New York Times* [is reporting that](#) Grenell will continue to be Ambassador to Germany while he is simultaneously serving as DNI, an arrangement that is as absurd as it sounds if only due to the distance between Washington and Berlin. He is reportedly already assembling his ONI staff and is “cleaning house,” which has included [the firing last Friday](#) of Maguire as well as ONI number two Andrew Hallman. It was also reported that even though a number of senior Republicans had privately advised Trump to appoint an intelligence professional for the DNI position, the president is keen to punish a “disloyal” IC.

The appointment of Grenell appears to be connected to [an incident two weeks ago](#) in which briefers of the ONI told members of the Democratic Party dominated House Intelligence Committee that Russia is planning to interfere in the 2020 presidential election to help Trump. The evidence for such a sweeping conclusion was not made public, but Trump was apparently enraged that ex-Navy Seal at-that-time DNI Joseph Maguire had allowed the briefing to take place and rebuked him sharply in an Oval Office meeting. Trump was particularly angry because committee chairman Congressman Adam Schiff was present at the Intelligence Committee briefing. Trump claimed that Schiff will “weaponize” the intelligence information to use against him. For what it’s worth, the office of the DNI is required to brief appropriate congressional committees on intelligence matters and national security.

Grenell is also [active in promoting](#) worldwide decriminalization of homosexuality, an agenda that has Donald Trump’s blessing but which has not please some administration religious fundamentalists like Pompeo and Vice President Mike Pence. Grenell objected to Pompeo’s decision not to support the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia, and was also critical of Pompeo’s blocking of a proposal to fly the gay pride flag from the same flagpole as the American flag at embassies across the world. During the recent Pompeo visit to the Munich Security Conference, Grenell brought his partner Matt Lashey to the airport to meet the Secretary of State. The irony is that up until a few years ago homosexuality was grounds for denial of a security clearance to perform certain IC jobs, based on the presumption that homosexuals might be vulnerable to blackmail by hostile intelligence agencies. Currently, two of the top positions in the IC, Director of National Intelligence and Director of Central Intelligence are homosexual.

Trump is taking both deserved and undeserved lumps over the new appointment. Former

head of the U.S. Special Operations Command retired Navy admiral William McRaven [has decried](#) the dismissal of Joe Maguire because Maguire was “only doing his job.” He [wrote an op-ed](#) which might be regarded to a certain extent as special pleading on behalf of a former fellow Seal: “As Americans, we should be frightened — deeply afraid for the future of the nation. When good men and women can’t speak the truth, when facts are inconvenient, when integrity and character no longer matter, when presidential ego and self-preservation are more important than national security — then there is nothing left to stop the triumph of evil.”

Former CIA Director John Brennan, who is an open Trump enemy with close ties to the Clintons and Obama, and who should be in prison for his attempt to frame the Trump campaign, declared himself “disturbed.” He inevitably invoked the Russians, demonstrating that he has not learned anything since he left office at the end of 2017. [He said that](#) “We are now in a full-blown national security crisis... By trying to prevent the flow of intelligence to Congress, Trump is abetting a Russian covert operation to keep him in office for Moscow’s interests, not America’s.”

By all means Donald Trump should have a free hand in cleaning out the Augean stables of top national security officials like Brennan who have been politicized and corrupted, but it should not be carried out by replacing some agency directors with ignorant cronies who will filter and spin the information that winds up being shared with congressional intelligence committees and with the president. There are plenty of honest people in the IC that could have been called on and who would have done a good job in serving national interests. Grenell is a solution from hell which will only make it even more likely that the poor decision making on foreign and national security policies that has characterized the past two decades will continue unabated and indefinitely into the future.

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