

# Vulnerability and Prowess: CIA Chief Mike Pompeo Meets the BBC

By [Dr. Binoy Kampmark](#)

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*In this age of reality television (or televised unreality), the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency was not going to miss out. Unlike other chief spies who operate in habitual darkness and moving shadows, **Mike Pompeo** was very keen to get his voice and opinion across on the [British Broadcasting Service](#).*

Pompeo specialises in seeing enemies everywhere, and to be fair, he is remunerated to do so. But he has taken his brief all too enthusiastically, seeing challenges to US hegemony at every corner, contenders for supreme power behind many an action. This, in one respect, is a re-enforcing phenomenon: the need for an intelligence service [has been questioned](#) at stages of US history, so its chiefs need to find reasons, however plausible.

It was only with the foundation of the US national security state and the arrival of the American imperium that a central intelligence agency was deemed necessary. The occasionally brutal mother of necessity dealt with the rest.

More has to be done, Pompeo insists, on combating covert Chinese influence through the world. (Shades of the Red Menace creep through the dialogue.) No animosity is intended, merely that they need to be combated. And when required, the CIA will still supply, in an old age fraternal manner, assistance that might foil a plot. St. Petersburg is cited as an example, but that hardly means that all is well with the Russian services. "I haven't seen a significant decrease in their activity."

Threats require inflation and propping up. Small is truly ugly, with North Korea being elevated to the level of existential bogeyman.

"We talk about [Kim Jong-un] having the ability to deliver nuclear weapons to the United States in a matter of a handful of months."

The CIA's role in this is distinctly hostile and averse to diplomacy.

"Our task is to have provided the intelligence to the president of the United States that will deliver to him a set of options that continue to take down that risk by non-diplomatic means."

This provision has, in the past, been tantamount to feeding an administration a fictional text, based on what might be in order to avert what might come. It bears repeating: before **Donald Trump**, there were [Weapons of Mass Deception](#); before this president, there was

“fake” news.

For Pompeo, old patterns will supposedly repeat themselves. Adversaries will continue to chew around the edges of American power, gnawing in hope. Russia will do what it supposedly did in 2016: interfere in the 2018 mid-term elections.

Pompeo’s strategy here is elementary. The enemy must be deemed sufficiently serious to warrant concern, but not such as to justify the tag of invincibility. Interference may take place, but it will all be in hand. The good shall prevail.

“I have every expectation that [the Russians] will continue to try and do that, but I’m confident that America will be able to have a free and fair election [and] that we will push back in a way that is sufficiently robust that the impact they have on our election won’t be great.”

This will be so even if his employer, a certain Donald Trump, is sceptical that Moscow got its paws dirty to begin with. From the start, President Trump has insisted that Russian electoral interference was hardly worth a jot on the political landscape.

“I don’t do fine lines,” returns Pompeo without a smirk of irony. “I do the truth.”

That truth – “exquisite” no less – is delivered “everyday personally to the president”.

This is surely a tall order for a President who regards truth in the most relative of terms, the sort that are shaped according to circumstance and curious angle. But the CIA chief is keen to impress the BBC that Trump is “very focused in the sense that he is curious about the facts that we present. He is curious in the sense he wants to understand why we believe them.” A touch double-edged, given that Trump has had his beef with the CIA and its record in the past on matters factual and truthful.

Mindful of singing for his supper, Pompeo insists that Trump is very much present, engaged and committed. There is nothing of the unhinged nature being asserted in **Michael Wolff’s** [Fire and Fury](#).

“The claim that the president isn’t engaged and doesn’t have a grasp on these important issues is dangerous and false, and it saddens me that someone would have taken the time to write such drivel.”

The paradox of such public pitches lies in their dual emphasis on vulnerability and prowess. Pompeo’s line runs something like this: the United States is vulnerable to virtually every body or entity, but also possesses the best counter-security measures of the globe. Given that the CIA has been asleep at the wheel on more than several occasions (remember the end of the Cold War or the planes of September 11, 2001?), prowess and proficiency have been periodically called into question.

Pompeo, however, is not interested in history when talking to the BBC.

“We’re the world’s finest espionage service.”

The CIA would continue to steal secrets and to “steal our secrets back”. The measure of his public engagement with the national broadcaster of a prominent ally is perhaps testament to how far things have fallen.

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*Dr. Binoy Kampmark was a Commonwealth Scholar at Selwyn College, Cambridge. He lectures at RMIT University, Melbourne. Email: [bkampmark@gmail.com](mailto:bkampmark@gmail.com)*

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