

The fallout from Epstein

by GWYNNE DYER

'It's amazing how the arrest of a 66-year-old man in Norfolk has raised the spirits of the entire country,' remarked a reader on the letters page of the Guardian this week. 'Perhaps a few more arrests are in order.'

The 66-year-old man was Mr Andrew Mountbatten-Windsor, until recently known as Prince Andrew in polite circles and as 'Randy Andy' in the British gutter press. He was arrested on 19 February for 'misconduct in public office', not for raping an under-age girl called Virginia Giuffre in Geoffrey Epstein's houses in London, New York and the Caribbean.

But at least he was arrested (and immediately released on bail).

Four days later, on 23 February, another British notable briefly honoured the inside of a British police station with his presence. It was Lord Peter Mandelson, a renowned 'fixer' in British politics and briefly UK Ambassador to the United States. The charge was the same vague 'misconduct in public office', and he, too, was immediately let out on bail.

But at least he was arrested. Nobody has been arrested in the United States as a result of the release of three million confidential documents belonging to the late financier, convicted paedophile and possible spy Geoffrey Epstein. Nobody at all is doing jail time for it except his partner-in-crime Ghislaine Maxwell.

The only people who have been arrested are Europeans: Andrew and Mandelson in the United Kingdom and Norway's former prime minister Thorbjørn Jagland (who only accepted free family holidays from Epstein).

It was probably just bad luck that the names of the two British men were not redacted in the Epstein data dump. Their names simply didn't ring a bell with the 500+ Department of Justice employees who spent several months redacting the names of prominent American men who had availed themselves of Epstein's various services.

So they were named and shamed (they have already done their 'perp walks' for British television), but it is unlikely that they will ever spend time in a British jail. 'Misconduct in public office' is a notoriously hard charge to make stick, and the possible charge of rape against Andrew is even harder to prove since the alleged victim is dead.

As for Epstein's vast network of information exchanges (which would also have served Epstein's work as a spy if he really was one), the case may remain open forever. We are left only with speculation - so let's speculate.

Start with the recent remark of US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, billionaire pal of Donald Trump, that Jeffrey Epstein was 'the greatest blackmailer ever.' Blackmail is usually about money, but it can also be for information.

From the guest-lists at his various houses of ill repute, it's clear that many of Epstein's guests were chosen as sources of information or ways of reaching other potential informants rather than just because they were filthy rich. And if they were vulnerable to being blackmailed, it was often because Epstein had taken the trouble to give them guilty secrets.

Why would he do all that? It seems too elaborate if Epstein's intention was just to create a modern version of the Hellfire Club (look it up), but it was the ideal tool if his intention was to gain access to a wide selection of powerful and well-informed Americans.

Some of them just wanted free holidays, some of them wanted to rub shoulders with other famous people, some of them wanted to have sex with under-age girls. Whatever their tastes, Epstein satisfied them.

So what intelligence agency would have the greatest interest in knowing America's secrets, including especially political and

commercial secrets? Well, the leading candidate is obviously the one that is most dependent on American support in almost every aspect of its existence: Israel.

]How would the Israelis have recruited Epstein, if they did? Through Ghislaine Maxwell, whose father Robert had worked closely with the Israeli spy agency Mossad. She moved to New York and linked up with Epstein shortly after her father died.

Does this prove that Epstein worked as an Israeli spy? Of course not, but it certainly makes him a candidate for the role. If he did, it's not such a big deal: Israel has always had spies in America. Jonathan Pollard was caught in the 1980s and spent 30 years in prison. Lawrence Franklin was caught in 2006 and sentenced to 13 years (but released very early).

There were doubtless other spies for Israel who did not get caught: these are almost routine transactions, although the unlucky ones who get caught pay a price. If Epstein was gathering sensitive but not officially secret information, he probably was not even breaking US law. But we'll never know unless Maxwell does a deal under some later administration.