

After the Manafort Indictment

by Conrad Black



The pretense of the Democrats to derive some pleasure from the Manafort and Gates indictments and the guilty plea of George Papadopoulos is one of the more challenging attempts at moralistic theatrics Senator Chuck Schumer has attempted in the last year. It doesn't quite measure up to bursting into tears on the Senate floor over a slightly restricted right of people from a few terrorism-afflicted or -sponsoring countries to visit America. But he did chin himself on the almost impeachable significance of the fact that someone has been charged with financial offenses and false sworn statements who, years after the actions objected to, was, for three months, the director of the Trump presidential campaign. Dream on, Senator, and be comforted by the Trump-hating media's portentous references to "walls" that "are closing in" (the Washington Post, quoting an anonymous Republican) and to the "darkest day" (C[linton]NN) . Mr. Manafort's lawyer declared

on the courthouse steps that President Trump was correct – that there was absolutely no evidence of any collusion between the Trump campaign and Russia – and went on to debunk the thought that his client had laundered money and evaded taxes by collecting it for patriation to the United States.

The fact that, on the same day as the Manafort and Gates indictments, Tony Podesta – who was intimately connected with the Uranium One dealings that were contemporaneous with extraordinarily large pledges to the Clinton Foundation and the celebrated \$500,000 speech-making payment to former president Clinton – retired as head of the firm that bears his name may indicate that Special Counsel Mueller is shifting gears with the evidence and broadening his attack, conducted by his largely Clintonian lawyer group. Gates had so little notice of what was coming that he had not even hired a criminal lawyer; he had a public defender enter his plea. I presume Mueller raced out with the Manafort-Gates charges in the hope that, if there were anything Manafort could say that would be damaging to Trump, an indictment such as this – the usual U.S. prosecutorial technique of throwing all the spaghetti at the wall (“conspiracy against the United States” is one of the more extreme charges) – will bring him to the standard plea bargain: giving extorted and false but incriminating testimony against the big target (Trump), in exchange for a reduced sentence with an immunity for perjured testimony. Mueller and his protégé James Comey are superstars in the firmament of this profoundly rotten system, but Manafort’s lawyer gave them clear notice that it won’t work.

At the same time, to shake Podesta out of his own company, and incite rumors in the Democratic press that the Podestas are being investigated (Tony’s brother, John Podesta, was Hillary Clinton’s campaign manager), means that Mueller is already much closer to lifting the rock all the way on the Clintons and Obama than he is to finding anything vulnerable around Trump or his campaign. Mueller is at the bifurcation of the

road. After over a year, there is not much more to try to find about the Trump campaign and Russia, since nothing happened and Russia's contribution was to release a number of emails it had illegally hacked, which embarrassed but did not convict any Democrat, and to contribute \$6,500 in Facebook advertisements decrying chaos in the country without supporting a candidate, in an election where the two main candidates spent \$1,850,000,000 between them.

Comey said in his appearance before the House Intelligence Committee that he had assured President Trump three times, starting on January 27, that Trump was not a target or suspect in the investigation of Russian collusion. This was three months after the FBI had taken over the so-called Steele dossier, which is now declared by the chairman and vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee to be the only remaining element of the Trump-collusion argument that could furnish proof of Trump-Kremlin collusion. The Washington Free Beacon, a conservative news outlet backed by distinguished Republican financier Paul Singer, engaged Fusion GPS, the normally left-wing special-services firm that assisted Democrats in political campaigns with destructive and questionable research, to investigate Trump's financial background and other controversial matters. The Free Beacon had abandoned Fusion as a researcher when Trump clinched the Republican nomination. The account was shopped to and taken over by the Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee: Christopher Steele, a retired British spy, was engaged only when the Clinton campaign and the DNC were paymasters (they paid Fusion over \$9 million). Steele was paid to engage others to solicit and pay for nasty reports about Trump from Kremlin officials, who, completely unaccountable, were incentivized to produce scandalous allegations. This is the lowest-quality intelligence, the sleaziest political sandbag job, and Comey took over the file for the FBI after the election. We do not know whether the FBI paid any more for the salacious gossip of Kremlin low-lives recruited and paid

by Steele, but this very dodgy information from unidentified Kremlin-gremlins is the cornerstone of the entire mighty smear job against the elected president of the United States, and it has been under FBI ownership for almost a year.

Not only is there almost certainly nothing there; the dossier has been floating around in the public domain for almost all of this year, and no respectable news organization would touch it until BuzzFeed (so partisan it won't accept Republican advertisements) ran it and CNN took up the hue and cry. There is nothing in the Steele dossier that any reasonable person would take seriously, and it was generated by Mrs. Clinton and her closest collaborators, all of whom have unctuously lied that they knew nothing about it. Now the authors of this outrage, which is a desecration of the entire American political process, are trying to pretend that there is still something to investigate in the Republican campaign. The congressman from the immense political pustule of HollyWeinsteinwood, Adam Schiff, says it doesn't matter who paid for the Steele dossier; we have to chase down its allegations. The FBI has done so; there's nothing there. The ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, Mark Warner (Va.), who you know is not telling it straight when he stammers and smiles compulsively like Katie Couric but with larger teeth, warns that there will be bipartisan challenges if the president pardons his supporters. This must be the last rhetorical refuge of a prosecutor with no case.

With the revelations that the Clintons and Democrats paid Kremlin scoundrels for a file of malicious and defamatory bile about Donald Trump, and lied about it for many months; that the FBI took it over and has used it as the basis for continued investigation; that the Obama White House might have used it for the unmasking of individuals in the Trump campaign after improper surveillance in the Trump Tower; and that this is all Comey had and Mueller now has on Trump-Kremlin collusion, we have finally come to the time for truth. Mueller

must soon acknowledge that he has no evidence of Trump-Kremlin collusion and move on with his mandate to investigate the Russian attempt to influence the election in more promising areas (e.g., the Democrats; he might be doing this with the Podestas), and he must, with Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, show cause why they should be allowed to continue at all, given their role in prosecution of part of the Uranium One affair.

If they do not do that, the president should avoid the opprobrium and controversy of firing the attorney general, Jeff Sessions – who has been unspeakably ineffectual in this most important matter after recusing himself when he had misinformed Congress about speaking with Russians, but has his moments otherwise – and nominate him instead to replace General Kelly as secretary of homeland security, and name Rudolph Giuliani or someone of approximately his stature as attorney general. The new attorney general should require that Mueller and Rosenstein give adequate assurance of their reliable non-partisanship. They, or their replacements, must certainly see whether there were any inappropriate contacts between the Trump campaign and the Russian government, almost inconceivable though that now is. But the murky depths of the Clinton pay-to-play casino, Fusion-Steele campaign dirty tricks, and Obama surveillance and smearing of Trump must be plumbed. If all are found guiltless, all should rejoice. If American public life was dangerously abased and undermined by all this possible skullduggery for no valid reason, the nation must know it, and its lawmakers must take enhanced preventive measures, even as the courts punish those who would so brazenly undermine the republic.

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