

Trump and FDR – Both Smear Victims

Partisan hackery in our intelligence agencies is a much greater threat to democracy than any purported 'collusion.'

by Conrad Black



The *New York Times* story last weekend, that senior FBI personnel took it upon themselves two years ago to open a counterintelligence investigation into whether the president of the U.S. was a Russian agent, reveals again both the putschist institutional megalomania of the Comey FBI and the national political media's addiction to defamation of the president – that is, the willful intent to defame him. The Steele dossier, commissioned by Fusion GPS on behalf of the Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee, a pastiche of lies, invented smut, and wild surmises, was used by the FBI as the basis for its rogue unconstitutionality,

even though at least some senior Justice Department officials knew the dossier was just mud-slinging propaganda from the defeated party. The rejected candidate, Hillary Clinton, cited the dossier as evidence of her opponent's "treason" (which now is deemed to occur in the U.S. only in war or equivalent conditions of international hostility), which cost her the election, and a few weeks after her book about the election emerged and the Steele dossier was exposed, Mrs. Clinton blandly changed her description of it from the credible effort of a retired British intelligence officer to "campaign information" but pretended its probative value was intact.

The moral of the story is that the intelligence and investigative agencies were compromised in their partisanship and illegally attempted to influence and then undo the 2016 election. There is no evidence that the Russian government did much beyond ineffectual social-media advertising debunking the U.S. generally, to no quantifiable effect on the outcome. What the CIA, DNI, and FBI and some in the Justice Department did, by contrast, was illegal and dangerous, and the incoming attorney general and Senate Judiciary Committee chairman (William Barr and Lindsey Graham, respectively) are refreshing in their expression of determination to get to the bottom of it. The gelatinous sanctimony of incoming Democratic House committee chairmen that they will continue to explore impeachable offenses by the president is so fatuous and repetitive it is becoming hard even for the unctuous babbling heads at CNN and MSNBC to work up much appetite for another round of the Russian collusion fable.

Thomas Jefferson has received insufficient credit for founding West Point, which was designed to give, and has given, the Army a nonpolitical officer corps. Three presidents graduated from the U.S. military academies: U. S. Grant and Dwight D. Eisenhower from West Point, and Jimmy Carter from the Naval Academy at Annapolis. None of them dabbled improperly in politics while in the armed forces. Intelligence and police

services have never claimed to have the same quality of professional dedication, and the nature of their work requires the agents and staff to dirty their hands at times, but there is no excuse for the antics of the directors of national and central intelligence and the FBI in the months before and after the 2016 election. The only one of them to be sent to a grand jury, so far as is publicly known, is Andrew McCabe, former deputy director of the FBI, but at least a dozen other senior officials and Mrs. Clinton and some of her principal campaign personnel all appear to have lied under oath, misled federal officials, or engaged in other illegal conduct. As I have written since the midterm elections, more important than congressmen Adam Schiff and Jerrold Nadler pretending from the committee chairs they have just ascended to find new evidence on the Russian canard will be a functioning attorney general and a judiciary committee that is not hobbled by a coalition of Democrats and anti-Trump Republicans.

The results to be hoped for are that the intelligence services and FBI take on board an absolute and permanent requirement to avoid this sort of partisan manipulation again, and that the whole federal political system finally learns the dangers of criminalizing policy differences. Ideally, there would be an authoritative retroactive conclusion that no articles of impeachment should ever have been voted against Andrew Johnson, Richard Nixon, or Bill Clinton, and certainly nothing has come to light to justify consideration of such measures now, after more than two years of intensive and very partisan investigation in a febrile hunt to do just that.

It would be a more satisfactory time in American political discourse if the intellectual right were in less disarray and were not largely still floundering about in search of a delusional third way between Democratic socialist stupidity, passivism in the world, and ecological horror fantasies on one side, and the lack of gentility and other stylistic infelicities of the Trump administration. It is a little like

those in the 20th century who sought an alternative to capitalism and socialism, from G. K. Chesterton to Jacques Rueff. I will not mention any of my conservative intellectual friends who are simply not rational about Trump and have elected to be a clangorous and irrelevant gang of misanthropes, now reduced to lofty disparagements of Trump's character. I believe some of them have mistaken spitefulness and snobbery for moral indignation, and their own miscalculations for Olympian serenity, but I rarely claim the right to impute motives to others, and mind-reading is usually odious as well as fraudulent. When Trump has gone, it will be easier to see and accept the good he will have wrought.

And Trump supporters are not immune from criticism. I must express my disappointment with radio and television commentator Mark Levin. I have never met Mark Levin but have generally liked him as a television personality who started as an anti-Democratic Never Trumper and has generally got on board as an administration supporter, putting questions of policy ahead of reservations about Trump's foibles. He is, however, unrigorous in his denigration of the "Democrat party," a cultural slur he should know to avoid, and purports to find a softness on Communism throughout its modern history. Levin's frequent return to the shameful and underpublicized dalliance of Teddy Kennedy with the Reagan-era Soviet leadership is a public service. But it has no relationship to the conduct of President Kennedy at any stage, and Robert Kennedy was a happy member of Joseph R. McCarthy's staff: and Joseph P. Kennedy, who made the money for all of them and bought the early elections, was so afraid of Communism, he was notoriously on the borderline of being a Nazi sympathizer.

But Levin's most objectionable gambit is the false and hackneyed claim that Franklin D. Roosevelt was gulled by Stalin. In the summer of 1940, Germany, Italy, Japan, and France were all in the hands of dictators hostile to the British and Americans. Five years later, those countries were

all in the hands of the Western Allies and on the way to being prosperous, democratic allies. Franklin D. Roosevelt was the chief architect of this transformation, while Stalin, Hitler's 1939 ally, absorbed 95 per cent of the casualties and 99 per cent of the physical damage among the Big Three in subduing the Nazis. Contrary to the Levin theory, former Communist spy Alger Hiss did not advise Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference; they never spoke there, and his only comment at Yalta was to oppose giving the USSR extra votes for Ukraine and Belarus at the United Nations. All of the official records of the conference and all of the memoirs of the participants are now available, and there was no inappropriate comment by Roosevelt to or about Stalin. The one Levin regularly produces about FDR trusting Stalin is an unsubstantiated sour-grapes invention of William Bullitt after Roosevelt had terminated his career because of Bullitt's hounding of under secretary of State Sumner Welles over a homosexual incident.

At Yalta, Stalin pledged absolute freedom for the countries of Eastern Europe, and Roosevelt withheld all of the \$6.5 billion aid plan he had promised Stalin because of Soviet violations of its Yalta commitments. The Joint Chiefs and Pacific Theater commanders (MacArthur and Nimitz) wanted Russia to take its share of the anticipated million casualties in subduing the Japanese home islands, and Roosevelt did not want to upset relations with Stalin until he knew if the atomic bomb would work. It was tested three months after Roosevelt died. The Yalta myth is another evil canard, like the Russian-collusion fraud, with less excuse, because it is now (as Al Gore might say), settled history. I refer Levin to any one of many serious analyses of the matter, including the relevant section of my life of Roosevelt. The entire strategic team that put in place the institutions and containment policy that won the Cold War were Roosevelt's chosen personnel: Truman, Eisenhower, Marshall, MacArthur, Acheson, McCloy, Kennan, and Bohlen.

American political discourse is never going to be the intelligent and civilized exchange it occasionally has been if, in contemporary matters as in the treatment of recent history, ostensibly serious people throw haymakers of blistering falsity: lies. Donald Trump is far from the suave trilingual aristocrat that Franklin D. Roosevelt was, but they are both and equally entitled not to be falsely accused of using their position to betray America to its rivals and enemies. It is difficult, in the one case as in the other, to take seriously, or even with tolerance, anyone who routinely makes such specious accusations.

First published in