

# The Mueller Charade

*The outcome of the midterms may depend on how quickly the administration can counter-attack on the legal front.*

by Conrad Black



The almost unnoticed fact in the latest Democratic assault on the Trump administration is that it is based entirely on charges of confusion, the circus, incoherence, and nastiness. These themes never have to be hammered very long before the faithful take up the incantation about impeachment, but these aren't impeachable, even if the charges were true. The Resistance has abandoned the accusation of impeachable offenses. The media barely noticed Special Counsel Robert Mueller's acceptance of written answers to questions about collusion, or Rudolph Giuliani's assertion that there would be no discussion of obstruction of justice, that there has been no obstruction, and that if Mueller thinks he has evidence of any, he should present it. Everyone now knows that the entire Trump–Russian collusion argument was a complete fabrication on

the basis of the Steele dossier, which was a pack of lies from A to Z, and, of course, was commissioned and financed by the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton campaign, through a law firm and Fusion GPS. In terms of ingenious political treachery, Mrs. Clinton and her entourage scored an immense success in subverting high levels of the intelligence agencies and the Justice Department and FBI to pursue this canard with the zeal they did.

On what has emerged to date, fanatically anti-Trump figures in Justice and the FBI swallowed Steele's story and invested in it so heavily they severely compromised the institutions that employed them. Once Trump was elected, instead of letting the ruse die quietly, they swallowed harder and set out to claim that the election result was fraudulent because of the illegal Trump–Russian collusion. Former National Intelligence director James Clapper announced just two months ago that he believed the Russians had determined the election result, contradicting James Comey's view. Senator Mark Warner, Democrat of Virginia, proclaimed 18 months ago that a thousand Russian canvassers had swung Wisconsin to Trump. The apparently thoroughly Trump-deranged John Brennan, former CIA director, has been routinely accusing the president of treason for almost two years. The 2016 Democratic vice-presidential candidate, Senator Tim Kaine of Virginia, mused about whether the president's son, son-in-law, and former campaign manager were guilty of treason because they met with a Russian lawyer who wanted to talk about the Magnitsky Act (nothing to do with the election).

Hillary Clinton must have been serenely confident that the source, quality, and funding of the Steele dossier would never see the light of day. In her memoir of the election, *What Happened* (not a question), she directly blames former FBI director James Comey for "shivving" her three times (two of the occasions were exonerations of her questionable appropriateness), and Donald Trump's semi-treasonable collaboration with the Russian government, and she quoted

Steele in support of this. When the fact came to light that her campaign had funded this nonsense for about \$9 million, she breezily said that it was "campaign information" but accurate anyway. (Treason applies only when collaboration is with a country with which the betrayed country is at war.)

It was the dirtiest political trick in American history, but, in fairness to Mrs. Clinton, I doubt if she intended to do more than throw muck at her opponent in the last days of the election, since the Billy Bush tape had not, as had been expected, knock him out. When she lost, as Steele himself was still, with the aid of some officials, padding around the less reputable media pushing his dossier, Mrs. Clinton seized on it to explain her inexplicable defeat and threw in poor old Comey, who had bent his giraffe-like frame over backwards to exonerate her on the emails debacle, where she almost surely lied to a federal official, Comey in particular. Martha Stewart was sent to prison for less, and seems to have violated serious statutes. This was when Peter Strzok had finished whitewashing Clinton for Comey and jumped to trying to inculcate Trump. He wrote, early on to his girlfriend and workmate, Lisa Page, of the collusion argument, that there was "probably no there there." Yet this purposeless beast of an investigation of something that everyone who knew anything about it knew did not happen is still continuing.

In their desperation to keep the president on his back foot until the midterm elections, the Democrats joined the Never Trump chorus in the McCain obsequies, and the habitually discredited political gossip Bob Woodward, reinforced by anonymous informants recruited or invented by the *New York Times*, wrote that the Trump White House was in chaos (irrelevant if the Constitution is not being violated and the policies work). Paid plants heckled at the Senate Judiciary Committee hearings where Democratic senators reenacted a fictitious movie about a first-century slave revolt to protest the confidentiality of documents that had already been

released, and Barack Obama hit the trail to rewrite the history of his broadly unsuccessful presidency. Even sensible and moderate commentators who don't like Trump went back on autocue to announce that this was "the darkest hour" of Trump's administration, as they have, every six weeks or so since the executive order about travelers from terrorism-plagued or -sponsoring countries in February 2017: Charlottesville, Helsinki, Manafort and Cohen, etc. Trump is about to declassify what congressional committees have been seeking, and the anti-Trump media will have real problems maintaining their implacable righteousness. By then, former FBI deputy director Andrew McCabe may have been indicted, and the charges won't stop with him.

I recommend clemency. I don't believe in a deep state, just an arrogant, smothering, bipartisan mindset that easily construed self-defense as service of the national interest, even when it involved criminal conduct. In this respect it does bear some comparison with the conduct of Nixon underlings in the Watergate era. The mystery is why Robert Mueller, for all his experience and vaunted probity, chose a gang of rabid Trump-haters to conduct this operation, and why, when he must have realized it was a wild goose chase, he didn't fold it up or turn it into an investigation of the sleazy conduct of Trump's enemies, which, given the Russian connection, would have been within his mandate. There is now evidence that Steele, even after he was fired by the FBI for leaking material, via senior Justice Department official Bruce Ohr "and his lovely wife," as Trump calls Mrs. Ohr (who worked at Fusion with Steele), moved straight to Mueller's special-counsel team. Mueller may have mishandled this so badly, he ensnares himself in the misconduct of those who commissioned him. Mueller has prolonged this false cloud over the administration while using his authoritarian office to try to terrorize Paul Manafort into a false inculcation of the president, has mouse-trapped a couple of lesser figures (14 days in jail for George Papadopoulos), and purported to indict a number of Russians

who will never appear in an American court and whose names could have been taken from the Moscow telephone directory.

The outcome of the midterm elections may depend on how quickly the administration can counter-attack on the legal front. When the Mueller charade is finally out of the way, everyone involved in the false applications for a FISA surveillance warrant against junior Trump campaign helper Carter Page will face the music, including Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and very prominent members of the Obama administration. Whatever happens in November, all this will unravel. The combination of the jungle ruthlessness of high American politics with the idealism of the Constitution occasionally creates bizarre and sordid dramas. Eventually, just when the pious claptrap about no one being above the law becomes almost insufferable, the puritanical conscience of America rises like a cobra and strikes the wrongdoers. The twist here is that the hunted president, who has broken no laws, will make the kill. It's reality politics, wending toward a surprising climax.

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