

Trump-Russia 'Collusion' Is Blowing Up Like the Hindenburg

by Conrad Black



It is delicious to see, even more suddenly and completely than anyone had anticipated, the breakdown of the steamroller media smear of Donald Trump. A trinitarian deus ex machina descended.

The Washington Post, struggling desperately in its discomfort, a few days ahead of the information being forcibly extracted by congressional subpoenas, acknowledged that the Clinton campaign and the Democratic National Committee had paid for the assembly of the Steele dossier.

This rotten fish of lies and gossip was universally regarded at first as rubbish so scurrilous no one would publish it for months until *Buzzfeed*, the bottom of the web barrel, took it up, which emboldened the flounder skimming the bottom, *CNN*, to present it as a major triumph of journalistic enterprise and to popularize it.

Carl Bernstein, one of America's most Pulitzer-laden

mythmakers, was exhumed to pronounce it an important document.

Finally, after everything else had led nowhere, bloodthirsty Trumpophobes like the leaders of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sens. Burr and Warner, acknowledged that Steele was all they could go on, and they could not get at its sources because of the intervention of special counsel Robert Mueller and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, preventing FBI officials from testifying before Congress.

CNN, through the pleasing Erin Burnett, wagging her puckered nose at us, tiresomely repeated that some aspects of the Steele dossier had been “proved,” but some were not corroborated, and that the dossier was initiated by Fusion GPS at the request of anti-Trump Republicans, whose place was taken first by the Clinton campaign, when Trump clinched the Republican nomination, and then by the FBI.

In fact, none of it has been seriously corroborated, and the only part of it with the slightest relevance to Trump’s legitimacy as president is a completely unsubstantiated suggestion that some promises might have been made to alter U.S. policy toward Russia favorably if the Russian government could affect the U.S. election’s outcome in Trump’s favor.

There is not a shred of evidence to support this, despite fervent efforts by the Obama administration and the special counsel to unearth some. Nor is there any evidence of actual Russian influence on the election result or of any policy change by the present administration toward Russia that the Kremlin would welcome. Nor, though *The New York Times* clings to the story, has any evidence surfaced that Fusion GPS was initially retained on this file by anti-Trump Republicans.

It was inexpressibly pleasant to see a *CNN* “expert” refer to the revelation that the sole remaining, pitiful wisp of hopeful damage to Trump and support of the collusion canard was this bit of slime bought and paid for by the Clinton

campaign as, get ready for it, "A talking point for the Republicans!"

As this hydrogen balloon was blowing up like the Hindenburg at the mast at Lakehurst, New Jersey, in 1937, the Uranium One affair was boiling over as a new congressional investigation was launched into the whole issue of about \$131 million to \$145 million being pledged or paid to the Clinton Foundation as Bill Clinton was paid \$500,000 for an ordinary speech in Moscow. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Attorney General Eric Holder agreed to sell 20 percent of American uranium resources to Russia, through Russian intermediaries then under intensive investigation by the FBI director, Robert Mueller, and by then U.S. attorney in Maryland Rod Rosenstein.

I am not quick to allege criminal wrongdoing, and the businessman chiefly involved is someone I know and respect, and it is not clear that anything harmful to national security occurred. But at the least, considering their ambitions to move back into the White House, the Clintons should have been more careful.

The trifecta was completed with the revelation that the investigation of former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort was not based on his brief relations with Donald Trump, but on his lengthy connection with the Democratic Podesta brothers, and the extent to which he helped them funnel wealthy and influential Russians into high governmental circles in Washington.

There need not be anything wrong with this either, but it has nothing to do with Trump and the entire fraudulent defamation that Trump did anything improper with the Russians, much less engage in anything compromising the validity of the 2016 presidential election. That claim is an outrage whose time for asphyxiation has come. Still to be unearthed are the full stories of the Wasserman Schultz skullduggery, and the real story of improper and probably illegal surveillance at Trump

Tower. As that will get all the way to President Obama, it may be expected to ooze out slowly and reluctantly, sluggish and foul.

Whatever anyone might have done, unless the Clintons took outright bribes for defined illegal services (very unlikely), the whole miasma should be blown away amid a consensus to stop and not to revive this baleful practice of criminalizing policy differences and political rivalries. There is even now no probative evidence that Richard Nixon committed any illegalities, though some of those about him clearly engaged in a criminal conspiracy to subvert justice. Nixon was an outstandingly competent and successful president.

There was no excuse for impeaching Bill Clinton, and, although he came close, he did not perjure himself. His were not the most stylish peccadilloes any American president has committed, but that had nothing to do with his fitness to serve out his term. There was no more reason to impeach him than there was poor Andrew Johnson in 1868.

The Russian collusion scam was just a convenient intersection between the denial syndrome of the post-defeat Clintonians and the fear and anger of the garrison of the Washington sleaze factory as the improbable avenger approached. Now that even Lindsey Graham, who a few months ago was running in front of television cameras to say he would introduce measures to secure Jeff Sessions and Robert Mueller in their jobs, is publicly warning the Democrats that it is their turn to do the tap dance and dodge the bricks, perhaps there is a chance that some more news outlets will cease to be cheerleaders for the resistance (to Trump) and go back to the long despised craft of reporting.

And Washington can look forward with fortitude and courage to an era when charlatans like the Dickensian-named Sens. Flake and Corker don't usurp public attention by name-calling and fatuous lectures in etiquette, as they announce that, as they

would be hammered at the polls if they tried to be re-elected, they will not try. May they leave quietly, and leave behind a capital that comes back to senses that departed it 20 years ago, and have been much missed.

First published in