

Trump, Comey exchange blows through the media

Patrick Martin
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Former FBI director James Comey's hour-long interview on ABC News Sunday night was a further demonstration of the intensity of the conflict between the White House and those sections of the military-intelligence apparatus that have spearheaded the anti-Russian campaign against President Trump.

Comey was given unprecedented media time. The actual interview with ABC News host George Stephanopoulos lasted five hours, and the network shared the transcript of the entire discussion with the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*, which published lengthy pieces Monday amplifying the media campaign against Trump.

There was little new of a factual character in Comey's remarks, nor are there apparently any further revelations to be had in his book, *A Higher Loyalty*, which goes on sale in bookstores today. But Comey was afforded a platform to denounce Trump as morally and ethically unfit to be president, although he rejected a proposed impeachment of Trump, declaring that he had to be ousted through the 2020 elections.

The entire discussion between Stephanopoulos and Comey unfolded on the basis of nauseating hypocrisy, as though the president of the United States, the chief executive of the global affairs of American imperialism, the "commander-in-chief" of the armed forces that do the bidding of Wall Street and the giant corporations, was under normal conditions some sort of exemplar of moral leadership.

To name only the three chief executives before Trump: Bill Clinton waged war against virtually defenseless populations in Somalia, Serbia and Iraq, bombed Sudan and Afghanistan, and slashed social welfare spending for the poorest of the poor. George W. Bush invaded and occupied Iraq based on lies about "weapons of mass destruction," while pushing through the biggest tax break for the wealthy since Ronald Reagan. Barack Obama

extended Bush's wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, added his own in Libya, Yemen and Syria, and engaged in weekly "terror Tuesdays" at which he approved lists of targets for assassination by drone missile. On the domestic front, he pushed through a reactionary counter-reform to slash spending on health care while overseeing the build-up of a surveillance state to monstrous proportions.

These are the mass killers and enemies of the working class against whom Donald Trump supposedly fails to measure up morally. It would be more accurate to say that in the gangster/con man president, the American ruling class has finally, like Oscar Wilde's Dorian Gray, found a figure that accurately displays its corruption in all its grotesque dimensions.

Comey understandably does not like what he sees, but he has played a significant role in all four administrations, most notably his four years as head of the FBI, one of the most notorious repressive agencies on the planet. For all his pontificating, he ran an agency that is a byword for persecution of working people and minorities, political spying and brutality and violence.

The main issue in the conflict between Trump and those sections of the military-intelligence apparatus represented by Comey is US foreign policy, particularly toward Russia. Given the opportunity by his interviewer, Comey declared flatly that the Russian government might "have something" on Trump—i.e., it might be in possession of incriminating material that could be used to blackmail the US president.

He also said that Trump was just as unwilling to criticize Russian President Vladimir Putin in private conversations as he was in public statements. "You would think that in private—talking to the FBI director, whose job it is to thwart Russian attacks, you might acknowledge that this enemy of ours is an enemy of ours," Comey said. "But I never saw. And so I don't know the reason."

But Comey was careful to say nothing of any substance

about the findings of the FBI investigation into alleged Russian intervention in the 2016 elections, during the 20 months that he was in charge of it. He would speak freely only about Trump's repeated requests that he spike the investigation into retired General Michael Flynn, Trump's former national security advisor, suggesting that the president was engaged in obstruction of justice, an impeachable and potentially criminal offense.

Trump continued his twitter blasts against Comey and Comey's former deputy, Andrew McCabe, declaring that they and other officials had "committed many crimes," although he did not name any of the supposed crimes or suggest any specific action by federal prosecutors. In a tweet the day before, Trump suggested that Comey should be jailed for leaking classified information to the press and for lying to Congress, although again he did not bother with specifics.

The bulk of Trump's energy Monday, however, was devoted to court proceedings in New York City, rather than rebutting Comey. Federal District Judge Kimba Wood held an extraordinary hearing at which Trump's longtime personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, sought to convince her to suppress materials seized by the FBI during raids April 9 on his home and office. The raids were conducted based on a search warrant obtained by the office of the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York.

Cohen's attorneys claimed that much of the material taken by the FBI was covered by attorney-client privilege, with Cohen either as the attorney or the client, depending on the document in question. Judge Wood rejected a motion to bar prosecutors from reviewing the seized material, but ordered prosecutors to provide a list of all the items to Cohen so he could present further requests for suppression.

The federal courthouse took on a circus atmosphere, with the president's personal lawyer battling the president's public lawyer (the Department of Justice), while another personal lawyer for Trump, Joanna Hendon, moved to allow Trump to personally review all the seized material, in addition to the motion sought by Cohen.

Hendon said the president "is objecting to anyone other than himself making the initial determination of privilege," warning the judge, "There's tremendous risk that privileged material could not be recognized as such."

In effect, Trump was arguing against his own Justice Department and the office of a US attorney he recently appointed, and seeking the right to see all the seized documents before any federal prosecutor could do so.

At one point, Wood ordered Cohen to make public the names of his clients (so that the validity of his claims of attorney-client privilege could be tested) and Cohen admitted that in the past 18 months he has had only three clients: Trump, former Republican National Committee finance vice-chair Elliott Broidy, and right-wing Fox News commentator Sean Hannity.

Federal prosecutors argued that the bulk of the material seized from Cohen's home and office concerned his business dealings, not his work as a lawyer, and revealed that none of the thousands of emails on Cohen's computer—one of the items seized—were between Cohen and Trump.

The only apparent concession to Cohen and Trump was the judge's statement that she was considering appointing a special master—a court officer separate from the prosecutor's office—to review the materials, in order to avoid any appearance of political bias. She asked both sides to brief her further on this issue.

It is evident that the Trump White House now views the Cohen investigation as an even more direct and dire threat than the investigation into alleged Russian interference into the 2016 elections and possible Trump campaign collusion being conducted by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

The Russia investigation, while endlessly hyped in the media, is a fraud, since Trump is not the agent of Vladimir Putin or the Russian oligarchs whose interests Putin defends, but the personification of the corrupt American financial oligarchy.

Any serious investigation into Trump's business dealings in Manhattan real estate, casino gambling, reality television production and other forms of corporate swindling would rapidly produce enough evidence to warrant an indictment on countless criminal charges—something that is true of nearly all of the American corporate elite.



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