

The US political police and the 2016 elections

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Thursday's edition of the *New York Times* carries an extraordinary, 4,000-word report on the role of the FBI in the 2016 US presidential election. Whatever the intentions of those who produced, edited and approved this lengthy account, it gives a glimpse of an American political system in which the security services, and particularly the FBI and CIA, play a critical and even decisive role.

Headlined "Code Name Crossfire Hurricane: The Secret Origins of the Trump Investigation," the article purports to provide a behind-the-scenes account of how the FBI probe into alleged Russian intervention in the US presidential election began. It is based on accounts provided from within the bureau itself, including top officials who have since been fired or pushed out by the Trump White House.

The *Times* claims that the FBI investigation was triggered by the Australian ambassador to Great Britain, Alexander Downer, who, after consulting with his government in Canberra, contacted US authorities to discuss his conversation with George Papadopoulos, a Trump foreign policy adviser, about efforts to obtain "dirt" on Hillary Clinton from Russian sources.

It is worth noting that the newspaper has a very different attitude to such Australian "meddling" than to the alleged efforts by Russia. There was no hyperventilating over an attack on American democracy, or suggestions that Australia was instigating an FBI investigation into Trump to "rig" the election on behalf of its preferred candidate, Hillary Clinton.

In any case, this single tip about Papadopoulos, described by the *Times* as "the young and inexperienced campaign aide whose wine-fueled conversation with the Australian ambassador set off the investigation," became the basis for the mobilization of massive resources, sending a team of FBI agents to London, reassigning "the same core of agents and

analysts who had investigated Mrs. Clinton" to probe the supposed connection between Russia and the Trump campaign. The team issued "national security" letters to obtain documents and get a wiretap on a former Trump adviser.

Giving a boost to this initial FBI probe was the intervention by the CIA. As the *Times* reports it, "The F.B.I.'s thinking crystallized by mid-August, after the C.I.A. director at the time, John O. Brennan, shared intelligence with Mr. Comey showing that the Russian government was behind an attack on the 2016 presidential election. Intelligence agencies began collaborating to investigate that operation."

What was later to become the Mueller investigation was already in place and operating at full blast before the election. The probe was extended to include Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign manager, and Michael Flynn, the retired general who had headed the Defense Intelligence Agency and was then a senior Trump adviser.

But as far as the *Times* is concerned, the main objection to the FBI's role is not that the political police intervened so massively in the 2016 election, but that the FBI's intervention tended to favor Trump and not Clinton, because the investigation into Trump and Russia was not made public before Election Day.

The *Times* account states regretfully, "The facts, had they surfaced, might have devastated the Trump campaign: Mr. Trump's future national security adviser was under investigation, as was his campaign chairman. One adviser appeared to have Russian intelligence contacts. Another was suspected of being a Russian agent himself."

The FBI was engulfed in something of a political faction fight, in which agency officials and agents were lined up in opposing camps. In response to internal pressure, FBI Director James Comey made two highly publicized interventions: in July 2016, when he berated

Clinton's conduct at a press briefing where he announced that no criminal charges would be brought against her; and in late October 2016, only ten days before the vote, when he revealed that the FBI had reopened the investigation.

As far as the Trump investigation goes, for all the subsequent noise and screaming headlines about Russian connections, not a shred of evidence has been provided that Russian activities in the 2016 campaign played any role in determining the outcome. Russian efforts on social media, such as the purchasing of \$100,000 worth of Facebook ads, were a drop in the bucket for a \$4 billion presidential campaign.

The exposure with the greatest impact on the Clinton campaign—the leaking of emails and memos showing the effort by Democratic Party officials to block the campaign of Bernie Sanders in the primaries, and the texts of Clinton's fawning speeches to Wall Street audiences—was devastating because it was true. It was not “fake news” or Russian propaganda, and it was provided via WikiLeaks, which has earned Julian Assange the lasting enmity of all sections of the American ruling elite.

Extracting the essential content from the lengthy *Times* narrative, one gets a glimpse of a political system in which both major parties, the Democrats and Republicans, are completely in thrall to the permanent state apparatus, agencies like the FBI, the CIA and the NSA, as well as the Pentagon, which wield vast and virtually unaccountable power, and effectively give the orders to their nominal civilian masters. In fact, as the 2016 campaign demonstrates, the military-intelligence apparatus actually chooses the politicians who will exercise “oversight.”

Hillary Clinton focused her campaign on winning the support of what is called the “deep state.” She enlisted hundreds of generals and admirals, former CIA and NSA directors, all to testify that she was the better choice for “commander-in-chief” and that Trump was incorrigibly reckless and incompetent. The Trump campaign sought to do the same, but they were outgunned in such a competition.

If the FBI had done what the *Times* now advocates, the result would have been a massive political destabilization campaign, on the scale of the Mueller investigation, but launched before rather than after the election. Both parties were hoping that such

investigations would help them and cripple their opponent.

The *Times* account gives the lie to all the media pretensions about “democracy” and “freedom” in America. The United States is a deeply class-divided society, in which two political parties of the financial aristocracy do the bidding of a state apparatus of coercion and violence of almost unimaginable dimensions.



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