

# Conflict escalates over FBI role in 2016 elections

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In the wake of the 568-page Justice Department inspector general's report issued Thursday, the political warfare in Washington over the role of the FBI in the 2016 elections continues to intensify.

While the report provided damning information on the pro-Clinton faction in the leadership of the FBI, a television interview Thursday night shed light on the pro-Trump faction within the same agency, centered in the New York field office, the FBI's largest and most influential office outside the agency's headquarters in Washington.

House Intelligence Committee Chairman Devin Nunes, speaking on the Laura Ingraham program on Fox News, revealed that dissident agents in the New York office contacted him in late September 2016 and told him that the FBI had obtained a new batch of Clinton emails that could lead to the reopening of the investigation into her use of a private email server while she was secretary of state, which the FBI had closed two months earlier.

Nunes described these "good FBI agents" as "whistle blowers," but they clearly were acting as partisans of Trump and the Republican Party, contacting a leading congressional Republican who had an interest in anti-Clinton information. Moreover, Nunes did not inform his Democratic counterpart on the Intelligence Committee, Adam Schiff, underscoring the factional warfare raging through official Washington.

A month later, FBI Director James Comey sent letters to congressional leaders informing them that the Clinton email probe was being reopened. This extraordinary action, only 11 days before Election Day, was in flagrant violation of a longstanding Justice Department rule against taking any public investigative action in relation to a political candidate within 90 days of an election.

The emails came to light in the course of a separate investigation into disgraced former congressman Anthony Weiner, then the husband of Hillary Clinton's closest aide, Huma Abedin, who was to face charges for exchanging inappropriate sexual messages with an underaged girl. When examining a laptop belonging to Weiner, FBI agents found copies of emails from Clinton, apparently sent by Abedin to her husband's laptop for the purpose of printing them out.

According to other accounts, the FBI first found these Clinton emails on September 26, meaning that agents in the New York office contacted the Republican chairman of the House Intelligence Committee even before top officials in the FBI's Washington headquarters knew of them. It is likely they also contacted former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, who had close ties with the New York FBI office from his years as US attorney for the Southern District of New York. Giuliani sparked numerous press reports about an impending FBI "bombshell" against the Clinton campaign in the weeks leading up to Comey's letter to Congress.

At the time, in the midst of the uproar provoked by Comey's letter, the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote, "One former Justice Department official suggested that Comey was under intense pressure from within the FBI over his previous declaration that no competent prosecutor would bring charges against Clinton over her use of the private server. If true, this means that sections of the federal police agency are in open revolt against the candidate who may shortly become their nominal 'commander-in-chief'" (see: "The FBI intervenes in the 2016 election").

It is evident that this was precisely the case. The FBI, the political police force of the American ruling elite, became a battleground during the 2016 elections

between pro-Clinton and pro-Trump factions, each seeking to make use of the agency's ability to conduct surveillance and carry out provocations and frame-ups against the rival candidate.

Peter Strzok, the assistant director of the FBI who headed the Clinton email investigation and the initial stages of the Russia-Trump investigation, was an ardent advocate of a Clinton presidency, like the bulk of the leadership of the national security apparatus. In a text message in August 2016 to his girlfriend Lisa Page, who was counsel to FBI Deputy Director Andrew McCabe, Strzok's boss, Strzok reassured Page that there would be no Trump presidency, because "We'll stop it."

This message, damning in its directness, especially given Strzok's position as the head of both investigations, has been concealed for nearly two years despite endless reports and leaks about the FBI's intervention into the 2016 campaign. It was first made public in the inspector general's report. The prolonged concealment by itself demonstrates how critical Strzok's role was in preparing the way for the investigation by Special Counsel Robert Mueller into supposed Russian interference in the elections.

It is widely expected that Strzok will be fired as a consequence of the inspector general's report, and both Trump and congressional Republicans have called for the FBI official's prosecution and jailing.

Strzok's attorney Aitan Goelman sent a letter to House Judiciary Committee Chairman Robert Goodlatte Saturday offering Strzok's voluntary testimony before the committee. "Special agent Strzok, who has been fully cooperative with the DOJ Office of the Inspector General, intends to voluntarily appear and testify before your committee and any other Congressional committee that invites him," Goelman wrote.

On Sunday, Representative Trey Gowdy, chairman of the House Oversight Committee, threatened to hold top FBI and Justice Department officials in contempt if they continued to block access to documents subpoenaed by his and other congressional committees. Speaking on Fox News Sunday, Gowdy said that he met with FBI and Justice officials Friday, along with Goodlatte, Devin Nunes and House Speaker Paul Ryan, to go over "item by item" the material subject to outstanding subpoenas.

Gowdy said that Ryan "made it very clear." He continued, "There's going to be action on the floor of the House this week if the FBI and DOJ do not comply with our subpoena request." The House would use "its full arsenal of constitutional weapons to gain compliance," including contempt of Congress.

This raises the prospect of congressional Republicans holding in contempt officials appointed by a Republican president—including FBI Director Christopher Wray and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein—because they refuse to share documents related to the investigations into that president and his Democratic opponent during the 2016 campaign.



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