

Filing by special counsel greeted with right-wing media celebration and Trump death threats

Patrick Martin
18 February 2022

A 13-page legal document filed by Justice Department Special Counsel John Durham last Friday has become the trigger for a frenzy in the right-wing pro-Trump faction of the corporate media, and a new fascistic outburst from the ex-president himself.

Trump issued a statement Saturday threatening 2016 Democratic presidential candidate and former Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, with “criminal prosecution” for her campaign’s alleged role in spying on his 2016 presidential campaign. Those involved were guilty of treason, Trump continued, and “in a stronger period of time in our country, this crime would have been punishable by death.”

There was “indisputable evidence that my campaign and presidency were spied on by operatives paid by the Hillary Clinton campaign in an effort to develop a completely fabricated connection to Russia,” Trump continued, claiming that it was a scandal “far greater” than Watergate.

One of Trump’s most fervent supporters in Congress, Ohio Republican Representative Jim Jordan, endorsed Trump’s declaration. “President Trump’s statement yesterday, I think, is right on target,” he told Fox News.

The Durham document itself provides no factual support for Trump’s claims, now taken up by Fox News and media outlets even further to the right. It is a legal motion seeking to have the court examine the possibility of a conflict of interest for the law firm representing former Clinton campaign attorney Michael Sussman, because the law firm also represents other parties involved in Durham’s investigation.

But it does shed some light on the origins of the Mueller investigation into the bogus claims that Trump was a stooge for Russian President Vladimir Putin. This

became the main axis of attack on the Trump administration by both the Democratic Party and the bulk of the corporate media aligned with the Democrats.

Durham, a long-time US attorney, was commissioned by then Attorney General William Barr in 2019, in the aftermath of the delivery of the Mueller investigation report, to investigate the actions of the FBI and the Justice Department in initiating the investigation in 2016 into allegations that Trump and his campaign had concealed connections to the Russian government.

In effect, Durham was to become the anti-Mueller for the political right, with his investigation serving their political interests just as Mueller was supposed to serve the efforts of the Democrats. But Durham disappointed Trump’s hopes, failing to deliver the type of election-eve bombshell that FBI Director James Comey supplied in October 2016, when he announced the resumption of the investigation into Hillary Clinton’s use of a private email server only a week before the election.

In October 2020, Barr formally appointed Durham a special counsel, giving him legal status to continue his investigation even if there was a change in administrations and a new, Biden-appointed attorney general. Biden could, of course, fire Durham at any time, but this would come at considerable political cost, particularly if the Republicans win control of the House of Representatives in November. They would then launch the same type of investigations against a Biden “cover-up” that the Democrats launched against Trump.

The Mueller and Durham probes have been very similar in terms of their methods. Mueller prosecuted a handful of minor figures who lied to his investigators,

but found no proof of any underlying crime. Durham has proceeded along the same lines as Mueller, finding no proof of any significant crimes, but instead bringing a series of charges against witnesses who allegedly committed perjury. But his targets lied to someone else, not to Durham.

In August 2021 Kevin Clinesmith plead guilty to falsifying documents, for which he received probation.

In November 2021 Igor Danchenko, a Russian-born analyst living in the United States, was charged with five counts of lying to the FBI. Danchenko, 43, compiled research for former British spy Christopher Steele's dossier of alleged Trump ties to Russia, most of them unsupported by actual evidence, but nevertheless repeated ad nauseam by the mass media.

In the case of Michael Sussman, the perjury charge also concerned lying to the FBI, when he met with FBI general counsel Jim Baker in September 2016 in an effort to induce the agency to investigate an alleged secret channel of communication between Trump Tower and the Russian Alfa Bank. This was supposedly a conduit for the Kremlin's "instructions" to what *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman had called "the Siberian candidate."

The "evidence" of this connection consisted of highly technical reports from an internet security firm, Neustar, which monitored DNS lookups for clients to determine whether there was unusual or threatening internet activity. One of its clients was the White House (under Obama), and it had access to many sensitive databases, not of the actual content of conversations, but of the connections between servers.

When asked by James Baker whether he was acting on behalf of a client, Sussmann, who was billing his time on this meeting to the Clinton campaign, reportedly said "no." In other words, the basis of the perjury was Sussmann's denial of a political interest in his report, not the substance of the report.

The FBI investigated the alleged connection to Alfa Bank and found nothing. But the allegation served its purpose nonetheless. It was leaked to the *New York Times* and taken up by the pro-Clinton media, which spent much of October braying about Trump's alleged connections to Moscow. Clinton herself had already raised the bogus issue, including during a nationally televised debate.

While the pro-Trump media falsely claims that

Durham has uncovered and made public a "smoking gun" about Clinton infiltrating and spying on Trump (neither word appears anywhere in the document filed by the special counsel), the pro-Democratic media has been downplaying the document for its own reasons. It particularly wants to prevent any conclusions from being drawn about the intimate connections between the Democratic Party, the military-intelligence apparatus, and the media.

This episode confirms that the Clinton campaign sought to instigate a federal investigation of its wholly unsupported claims that Trump had secret connections to Russia. This was part of the Democratic candidate's effort to corral the support of as much of the national security establishment as possible, support which was demonstrated by long lists of former generals, admirals and intelligence officials endorsing her campaign. Her campaign was directed not to working people, but to the military-intelligence apparatus.

Both capitalist parties have long engaged in "dirty tricks" campaigns as part of their conflict over the distribution of the spoils of American politics—positions, political power, money. This conflict is taken to a new level with the transformation of the Republican Party into an openly fascistic political organization. Trump's suggestion that his Democratic opponents should be prosecuted for "treason" and face execution is another demonstration of this trend.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact