

# The IG Report and Partisan Cherry Pickers



From time to time, I hear from readers who are frustrated that I don't spend much time writing about alleged U.S. government conspiracies and "witch hunts" supposedly designed to oust our president. For some on the right, it's almost unconscionable that a conservative writer like myself isn't in a constant state of outrage over the proclaimed betrayal. They think I should be taking the lead of Fox News prime-time pundits and other media-conservatives by focusing my efforts on exposing the "deep state."

One reader was even so angered by my supposed negligence the other day that he called me an "Adam Schiff sycophant." I found this rather amusing being that I believe the nicest thing I've ever said about Schiff is that he's a "political hack" who "doesn't have a lot of credibility."

Anyway, I've explained my position on these topics a number of times, but here it goes again...

When it comes to rather serious accusations of government corruption – serious enough that major investigations are announced and launched – I’ve found it best to wait until *after* the evidence from the investigations has been presented. Far more often than not, partisan-media speculation (which is often falsely presented as fact) ends up being very wrong or at least significantly flawed.

The unfortunate reality is that a *lot* of political commentators aren’t particularly interested in getting to the bottom of such things, but rather in rising to the top of the television, radio, and web-click rankings. There are times when truth-seeking and outrage-peddling coincide, but the latter is almost always the predominant motivation. And when the facts and a more complete story eventually do emerge, these same people usually either end up clinging to their debunked narrative, or seamlessly rolling into a new theme and line of attack (without ever revisiting the folly of their previous charges).

If I played this partisan-outrage game in my columns, I’m sure my readership would be much higher and the feedback from my side of the aisle much more complimentary. But commentary isn’t my career, and facts are more important to me than political narratives and confirming people’s biases. So I’ll continue to offer you folks the fairest and most informed assessments that I can.

Sorry if that bothers some of you.

I largely took the “wait and see” approach on the Russia investigation and Trump impeachment hearings, and chose to do the same with the Inspector General’s investigation into the origins the Trump/Russia collusion allegations. With the release of the IG’s report, I now have much better information to work with. And instead of doing what media-partisans are doing by cherry-picking the stuff they like, and disregarding what they don’t, I’m going to take a bit broader view.

Let's begin with the chorus that President Trump and many of his supporters having been singing for years now – that the Russia investigation was a coordinated and corrupt “deep state” conspiracy orchestrated to remove President Trump from office. According to the report, that was very clearly not the case.

Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz concluded that the FBI indeed had an “authorized purpose” and legitimate justification when it opened the July 2016 investigation (code-named “Crossfire Hurricane”) into links between Trump associates and Russian officials. He also found no evidence of “political bias or improper motivation” influencing the decision to open that investigation. The same was true of four separate investigations of Paul Manafort, Michael Flynn, George Papadopoulos, and Carter Page.

Additionally, there was no evidence, prior to *Crossfire Hurricane*, that the FBI used undercover or confidential sources to interact with members of the Trump campaign. Nor was there any evidence that the FBI had ever placed any such sources “within” the Trump campaign. There wasn't even any wiretapping of the campaign, contrary to what President Trump had famously claimed on Twitter a while back.

In other words, there was no attempted government “coup.” And those insisting that the report proved otherwise, and that their deepest fears (including treason) were validated, shouldn't be taken at all seriously.

But contrary to the insistence of people like James Comey and many in the liberal media, the report was by no means a vindication of the FBI. In fact, the findings were actually quite bad for the bureau, not so much in the realm of institutional corruption but rather incompetence...and a fair amount of it.

Horowitz identified several instances of errors and glaringly

poor judgment within the organization. This included a number of FISA applications related to Carter Page that were lacking important information that would have otherwise challenged the legal bar for probable cause. In fact, the warrant request on Page was based heavily on the very sketchy Steele dossier. And with each warrant renewal, the process worsened with the FBI making at least 10 "significant errors."

One FBI lawyer even adjusted a legal document to mislead the court, and there was an ethical breach involving Bruce Ohr, a DoJ attorney who was in communications with Christopher Steele after the FBI severed its relationship with him; Ohr's wife was an independent contractor working with Fusion GPS (where the Steele dossier mostly came from).

What makes such dereliction particularly troubling is that everyone involved at the FBI assuredly knew how sensitive any investigation (even indirectly) involving a political campaign should have been handled. If this kind of negligence exists in the FISA process for figures connected to a presidential nominee (for which there would likely to be a review), just imagine what kind of negligence may exist in cases of lower visibility.

For that reason, Horowitz announced an audit of the FISA process itself. And that's exactly what should be done in response to what we've learned.

After all, accountability in government is important. These officials (even the unelected ones) ultimately work for us, the American people. As their employers, we should want incidents of wrongdoing to be reviewed. And if appropriate, the involved individuals should face consequences, and processes should be reformed. We should insist on this not only within our intelligence agencies and other government institutions, but also from our elected representatives.

For example, if one of our leaders attempts to extort

political favors from a foreign entity, using congressionally approved taxpayer funding, we should at minimum be concerned about that, and expect at least some form of answerability. Should we not?

But many of us are perfectly willing to selectively turn a blind eye to, and even defend, government malfeasance when it's politically advantageous to do so. That's what we're seeing right now from both tribes: partisans, in and out of the media, cherry-picking the IG's findings and insisting that the report has validated *their* side of the corruption argument.

If that's what political consumers want, fine. But let's knock off all these memes about "draining the swamp." People who only care about government accountability for the *other side* are effectively helping to *fill* that swamp.

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