

Trump versus the FBI

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The attempt to tease, weave and develop a narrative against President Donald J. Trump over a Russian connection began almost immediately after his victory in November last year. This was meant to be institutional oversight and probing, but in another sense, it was also intended to be an establishment's cry of hope to haul the untenable and inconceivable before some process. No one could still fathom that Trump had actually won on his merits (or demerits). There had to be some other reason.

Central to the Trump-Bannon approach to US politics has been the fist of defiance against those entities of establishment fame. There is the Central Intelligence Agency, which Trump scorned; there is the FBI, which Trump is at war with. Then there is the Department of Justice, which he regards as singularly unjust.

The FBI investigation into Trumpland and its reputed nexus with Russia remains both bane and opportunity for Trump. As long as it continues, it affords Trump ammunition for populist broadsides and claims that such entities are sworn to destroy him.

To watch this story unfold is to remember how a soap opera can best anything done in celluloid. The *New York Times* has given us a New Year's Eve treat, claiming that former Trump campaign aide George Papadopoulos spilt the beans to former Australian foreign minister Alexander Downer at London's Kensington Wine Rooms in May 2016.

The two men had, apparently, been doing what any decent being does at such a London venue: drink. Papadopoulos' tongue started to wag as the imbibing continued. There was a Russian connection. There was dirt to be had, featuring Hillary Clinton.

Downer, however hazed, archived the discussion. He could make a name for himself with this decent brown nosing opportunity. Australia, Washington's ally with an enthusiastic puppy dog manner, wanted to help, to tip off US authorities that a great Satan, Russia, might be involved. So commenced the long road to the fall of Trump's former aide, who conceded, in time, to have lied to the FBI. Trump's response was to [degrade Papadopoulos](#) as a "low-level volunteer" and "liar", giving him the kiss of unimportance.

Australian ex-officials were by no means the only ones involved in providing succour to the anti-Trump effort. A picture was being painted by other sources – British and Dutch, for instance – pointing to the Kremlin as central to the Democratic email hacks. The FBI probe, in time, would become the full-fledged investigation led by a former director of the organisation, Robert Mueller.

This provides the broader context for the Trump assault on all manner of instruments in the Republic. Earlier in December, Twitter was again ablaze with the president's fury. The blasts centred on the guilty plea by former national security advisor Michael Flynn. He had,

in fact, had conversations with the former Russian ambassador.

Trump's approach was two-fold: claim that Flynn's actions had been initially, at least, lawful, while the [conduct of the FBI and Department of Justice](#) had been uneven and arbitrary.

“So General Flynn lies to the FBI and his life is destroyed, while Crooked Hillary Clinton, on that now infamous FBI holiday ‘interrogation’ with no swearing in and no recording, lies many times... and nothing happens to her?”

He then reserved a salvo for the DOJ.

“Many people in our Country are asking what the ‘Justice’ Department is going to do about the fact that totally Crooked Hillary, AFTER receiving a subpoena from the United States Congress, deleted and ‘acid washed’ 33,000 Emails? No justice!”

The persistent inability to understand Trumpland as a series of bullying and exploitative transactions blunts the value of the FBI investigation. Whatever it purports to be, it smacks of desperation, an effort in search of an explanation rather than a resolution. The Trump Teflon remains in place, immovable.

More to the point, Trump is certainly right in questioning the *historic* inability of the FBI to be a credible instrument of justice, even if history is not his strong suit. The Bureau under J. Edgar Hoover was a monster of surveillance, its reputation, despite being in deserved tatters, defended by one president after the other.

As for bias, Trump is certainly right on the score that certain FBI officials, foremost amongst them lawyer Lisa Page and FBI special agent Peter Strzok, were demonstrably [favourable to Clinton](#) over him.

The Trump campaign, keen to find chinks in the Clinton camp, was always going to be indiscriminate and characterised by ruthlessness: the provenance of the information was hardly going to matter. Be it a hack, a disclosure; be it legitimately or illegitimately obtained, information in this context proved to be advertising power.

To that end, anything against Hillary would have been treated as rich mineral, whatever quarry it might have been hewn from. That it stemmed from Russian sources gave fever to those still gripped by Cold War nostalgia.

In the new year, the antics will continue and Trump will, as he has all year, continue to receive blows with a certain nonchalance. He will also retaliate in kind. The establishment forces have been busy on various fronts, but the Trump machine, authoritarian, unreflective, but resolute, continues to function with indignant disdain. As long as that lasts, he will thrive.

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