



Accountability and Willful Blindness

by Richard W. Rahn

Those who serve in the military know they will be held accountable when they are irresponsible or reckless because the lives of their fellow warriors are at stake. In contrast, there is often little accountability in much of non-military government civil service, which often results in sloppy work practices.

Last year, the Navy had two separate cases of a warship colliding with a merchant ship; in each case leading to the deaths of Navy sailors. The Navy, to its credit, quickly retired the admiral responsible for Pacific fleet operations and then announced that both ship captains and some of the other officers would be court-martialed and subject to criminal charges of negligent homicide, which could result in jail time.

This past week, 17 people were killed by a high-school shooter after the FBI failed to act on recent explicit warning messages. It could be argued that the FBI officials who failed to responsibly respond to the warnings may also be guilty of negligent homicide, yet the only punishments that are being discussed at this moment in time are dismissals. The double standard is glaring. Why should government law enforcement personnel be held to a lesser standard than the military, when their negligent behavior also causes loss of innocent lives?

In recent months, the American public has seen a steady stream of misbehavior by senior FBI officials. We now know that the Russians successfully sowed much discord in our political process by taking actions to both hurt and help all of the major presidential candidates. The Russians' goal does not appear to

have been to elect one candidate or another — because, at the same time they were trying to benefit Donald Trump by spreading misinformation about Hillary Clinton, they were feeding the Clinton campaign with disinformation about Mr. Trump in the famous “dossier.”

In the case of the dossier, we now know that senior FBI officials were using what they knew to be disinformation to justify investigations of the Trump people.

Several years ago, private investigators and journalists (outside the mainstream media) discovered that the Russians were indirectly funding some U.S. environmental groups in order to both influence U.S. policy and help the Democrats. I was one of those who wrote several articles about what had been going on.

The FBI and other federal law enforcement agencies appeared to have been willfully blind about the matter — they had or should have had the records of the money transfers — even after the news reports, although federal financial disclosure and other laws were being violated. Robert Mueller was director of the FBI at the time.

There is also the Uranium One scandal, whereby the Clintons appear to have assisted the sale of major U.S. uranium assets to the Russians in exchange for major contributions to the Clinton Foundation and payments to former President Clinton. This apparent malfeasance was again uncovered by private investigative journalists, and not by the FBI, who had the information about the financial flows. And again, Robert Mueller was director of the FBI when this activity took place.

The reason the various government scandals are often not uncovered by the mainstream media is not only because of political bias, but the fact that too many reporters are on the “information take” from government officials, whereby they receive tips and other information in exchange for favorable press coverage. The practical effect is no different from the reporter paying cash to the government official for information, or the government official paying

the reporter cash for favorable coverage — information is fungible.

Government officials are supposed to recuse themselves from an investigation if there is even an appearance of conflict of interest. Robert Mueller is still investigating Russian influence on the 2016 election; yet, as noted above, he is obviously conflicted. There are many fine retired judges who could undertake the probe in a highly competent manner without the conflicts.

If the FBI were a private organization, the families of the Florida high-school victims would be able to sue both the organization and the individuals who failed to do their jobs for wrongful death. If the Justice Department and FBI were public companies, the SEC would likely prohibit them from investigating themselves, as is now happening. Because of the ancient doctrine of sovereign immunity, it is most difficult to sue the government and its employees for their transgressions without the government giving explicit permission.

There is a field of economics called “public choice” that deals with the fact that government bureaucrats and members of the media too often put their own interest and that of their comrades above the public interest. Members of Congress could do more to limit the sovereign immunity of government employees — but they most often give in to the pressure from those same employees, as we have seen in the seemingly never-ending unsuccessful attempts to reform the Veterans Administration (VA).

Part of the solution is to privatize as many government agencies as possible. For instance, abolishing the VA and giving veterans health-care vouchers, if properly done, should result in better health care at lower cost — without the conflicts of interest.

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