



Watergate Redux

by Richard W. Rahn

Was Watergate worse than the present scandal? Do you know what the crime was in Watergate?

It has been 46 years since the famous break-in at the Watergate hotel in June 1972. In sum, officials of President Nixon's re-election campaign were trying to obtain information on what their opponents were doing, by bugging the DNC offices, in order to lessen any chance of losing the election. (One of the ironies is that the only working bug was on the phone of a mid-level staffer that revealed no useful information.)

Even though there were fewer than a dozen individuals involved in the original break-in, 69 people were ultimately indicted and 48 pleaded guilty or were convicted. Members of the Nixon team were able to co-opt a few current and/or former FBI, CIA and IRS officials to use their experience or agencies as a political weapon.

Mr. Nixon was very far ahead in the polls, and eventually won 49 out of 50 states in both a huge popular and electoral vote landslide. If the Nixon people had played by the rules, his vote total might have even been higher, because the original break-in by Nixon operatives was known by Election Day (but not the details of all of the other abuses of power).

Some who were involved justified their actions in a belief that the election of Nixon's opponent, George McGovern, would have posed

a great danger to the country. Sen. McGovern appeared to be hopelessly naive about both foreign and economic policy. Much of the Washington establishment was fearful of him, including many leading Democrats.

Mr. Nixon was not well liked but, unlike Mr. McGovern, he was viewed as experienced and competent. (In fact, Mr. Nixon was a disaster when it came to economic policy — ignoring the advice of his economists by imposing wage and price controls, and increasing the size of government.)

Most of those convicted allowed themselves to be dragged into aspects of the cover-up, out of loyalty to the president and the administration, or because they believed they were acting patriotically by doing whatever was necessary to keep Mr. McGovern from gaining power. And, of course, many of them had career aspirations that would have been delayed or derailed if Mr. McGovern won.

The current election scandal is motivated by many of the same impulses that drove the Watergate lawbreakers. Hillary Clinton seems to have had a desperate fear of losing, even though she was far ahead in the polls. Why else would she have engaged in the dirty tricks she employed against the Bernie Sanders campaign and used her own private computer servers in clear violation of the rules?

President Obama, although appearing confident of a Clinton victory, apparently feared a Trump win would undo his legacy — which is precisely what has happened — and thus it had to be prevented by whatever means.

The leadership of the Justice Department, IRS, FBI, CIA and others in the Obama administration have been, and continue to show themselves to be, fierce Democratic partisans. Again, their motivations for what increasingly appears as extensive inappropriate and illegal behavior seem to be much like their Watergate predecessors.

Former FBI Director James Comey, former CIA Director John Brennan, and former director of National Intelligence James Clapper have all publicly stated that they do not believe Mr. Trump is fit to be president — with the implicit argument that stopping him is their patriotic duty — the law be damned.

A number of their underlings, such as Peter Strzok, Lisa Page, Andrew McCabe, etc. seem to have had similar motivations as revealed in the famous Strzok “insurance policy” text message. Part of the insurance policy seems to have been the creation of the phony dossier which was used to get the FISA warrant to bug members of the Trump campaign and, like Watergate, the bug seems to have produced no useful information.

The Russian-collusion cover story falls further apart each week. The Russians have been trying to mess with other countries' elections for 100 years. Anyone who is surprised does not know history. The Mueller investigation is a sideshow, whose credibility will only continue to weaken as more people become aware that Mr. Mueller hired Democrat donors and hit men, and not serious objective investigators.

There are also many questionable activities in Mr. Mueller's past — some of which have become known and others yet to come. Each day, as the “investigation” continues, Mr. Mueller's reputation will diminish.

Watergate resulted in two attorneys general being indicted (John Mitchell was convicted, and Richard Kleindienst pleaded guilty to a lesser charge). Many senior White House and agency staff, and Nixon lawyers were also convicted, including a former secretary of Commerce (Maurice Stans).

The most common offense was perjury, including lying about illegal campaign contributions and spending. As with all such past scandals, the participants turned on each other in order to obtain lighter treatment — and the current scandal is most likely to follow the same playbook.

The open question is, how many former Obama officials will be indicted? There are videos of a number of them where they contradict each other and even themselves — which is perjury. The final irony is that if both Richard Nixon and Hillary Clinton had played by the rules, Mr. Nixon would not have had to resign, and Mrs. Clinton would be president.

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