

'This is Nuts': Liberals Launch 'Largest Mobilization in History' in Defense of Russiagate Probe

Exclusive: Hundreds of thousands have pledged to take to the streets if Special Counsel Robert Mueller is removed, reflecting misplaced priorities and some fundamental misunderstandings, report Coleen Rowley and Nat Parry.

By Coleen Rowley and Nat Parry

With Democrats and self-styled #Resistance activists placing their hopes for taking down Donald Trump's presidency in the investigation being led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, online groups such as MoveOn and Avaaz are launching campaigns to come to the Special Counsel's defense in the event of him being removed by the president.

In an action alert to supporters on Wednesday, Avaaz announced plans to hold some 600 events around the country to defend Mueller in case Trump tries to fire him. "This is nuts," Avaaz writes. "Trump is clearly gearing up to fire the independent official investigating Russia's influence over the election – if he does, he'll have delivered a death blow to one of the fundamental pillars of our democracy."

Avaaz claims that hundreds of thousands of supporters have signed up for actions protesting Mueller's possible removal, and that more than 25 national organizations support the protests. The group calls it potentially "the largest national mobilization in history."

Considering all of the threats to democracy posed by unconstitutional overreach, unfair elections, corruption, and voter suppression – not to mention environmental challenges, economic inequality, an out-of-control U.S. foreign policy, numerous foreign conflicts that the U.S. is engaged in, and the ever-present threat of nuclear war – it is telling that the liberal establishment is mobilizing on this particular issue.

Social psychologists have long talked about how emotional manipulation can work effectively to snooker a large percentage of the population, to get them, at least temporarily, to believe the exact opposite of the facts. These techniques are known in the intelligence community as "perception management," and have been refined since the 1980s "to keep the American people compliant and confused," as the late Robert Parry has reported. We saw this in action last decade, when after months of disinformation, about 70% of Americans came to

falsely believe that Saddam Hussein was behind 9/11 when the truth was the opposite – Saddam was actually an enemy of the Al Qaeda perpetrators.

Such emotional manipulation is the likely explanation for the fact that so many people are now gearing up to defend someone like Mueller, while largely ignoring other important topics of far greater consequence. With no demonstrations being organized to stop a possible war with North Korea – or an escalation in Syria – hundreds of thousands of Americans are apparently all too eager to go to the mat in defense of an investigation into the president's possible "collusion" with Russia in its alleged meddling in election 2016.

Setting aside for the moment the merits of the Russiagate narrative, who really is this Robert Mueller that amnesiac liberals clamor to hold up as the champion of the people and defender of democracy? Co-author Coleen Rowley, who as an FBI whistleblower exposed numerous internal problems at the FBI in the early 2000s, didn't have to be privy to his inner circle to recall just a few of his actions after 9/11 that so shocked the public conscience as to repeatedly generate moral disapproval even on the part of mainstream media. Rowley was only able to scratch the surface in listing some of the more widely reported wrongdoing that should still shock liberal consciences.

Although Mueller and his "joined at the hip" cohort James Comey are now hailed for their impeccable character by much of Washington, the truth is, as top law enforcement officials of the George W. Bush administration (Mueller as FBI Director and Comey as Deputy Attorney General), both presided over post-9/11 cover-ups and secret abuses of the Constitution, enabled Bush-Cheney fabrications used to launch wrongful wars, and exhibited stunning levels of incompetence.

Ironically, recent declassifications of House Intelligence Committee's and Senate Judiciary Committee Leaders letters (here and here) reveal strong parallels between the way the public so quickly forgot Mueller's spotty track record with the way the FBI and (the Obama administration's) Department of Justice rushed, during the summer of 2016, to put a former fellow spy, Christopher Steele up on a pedestal. Steele was declared to be a "reliable source" without apparently vetting or corroborating any of the "opposition research" allegations that he had been hired (and paid \$160,000) to quickly produce for the DNC and Hillary Clinton's campaign.

There are typically at least two major prongs of establishing the "reliability" of any given source in an affidavit, the first – and the one mostly pointed to – being the source's track record for having furnished accurate and reliable information in the past. Even if it is conceded that Steele would have initially satisfied this part of the test for determining probable cause, based on his

having reportedly furnished some important information to FBI agents investigating the FIFA soccer fraud years before, his track record for truthfulness would go right up in smoke only a month or so later, when it was discovered that he had lied to the FBI about his having previously leaked the investigation to the media. (Moreover, this lie had led the FBI to mislead the FISA court in its first application to surveil Carter Page.)

The second main factor in establishing the reliability of any source's information would be even more key in this case. It's the *basis* of the particular informant's knowledge, i.e. was the informant an eye witness or merely reporting double-triple hearsay *or* just regurgitating the "word on the street?"

If the actual basis of the information is uncertain, the next step for law enforcement would normally be to seek facts that either corroborate or refute the source's information. It's been reported that FBI agents did inquire into the basis for Steele's allegations, but it is not known what Steele told the FBI – other than indications that his info came from secondary sources making it, at best, second- or third-hand. What if anything did the FBI do to establish the reliability of the indirect sources that Steele claimed to be getting his info from? Before vouching for his credibility, did the FBI even consider polygraphing Steele after he (falsely) denied having leaked his info since the FBI was aware of significant similarities of a news article to the info he had supplied them?

Obviously, more questions than answers exist at the present time. But even if the FBI was duped by Steele – whether as the result of their naivete in trusting a fellow former spy, their own sloppiness or recklessness, or political bias – it should be hoped by everyone that the Department of Justice Inspector General can get to the bottom of how the FISA court was ultimately misled.

As they prepare for the "largest mobilization in history" in defense of Mueller and his probe into Russiagate, liberals have tried to sweep all this under the rug as a "nothing burger." Yet, how can liberals, who in the past have pointed to so many abusive past practices by the FBI, ignore the reality that these sorts of abuses of the FISA process more than likely take place on a daily basis – with the FISA court earning a well-deserved reputation as little more than a rubberstamp?

Other, more run-of-the-mill FISA applications – if they were to be scrutinized as thoroughly as the Carter Page one – would reveal similar sloppiness and lack of factual verification of source information used to secure surveillance orders, especially after FISA surveillances skyrocketed after 9/11 in the "war on terror." Rather than dismissing the Nunes Memo as a nothing burger, liberals

might be better served by taking a closer look at this FISA process which could easily be turned against them instead of Trump.

It must be recognized that FBI agents who go before the secret FISA court and who are virtually assured that whatever they present will be kept secret in perpetuity, have very little reason to be careful in verifying what they present as factual. FISA court judges are responsible for knowing the law but have no way of ascertaining the “facts” presented to them.

Unlike a criminal surveillance authorized by a federal district court, no FBI affidavit justifying the surveillance will ever end up under the microscope of defense attorneys and defendants to be pored over to ensure every asserted detail was correct and if not, to challenge any incorrect factual assertions in pre-trial motions to suppress evidence.

It is therefore shocking to watch how this political manipulation seems to make people who claim to care about the rule of law now want to bury this case of surveillance targeting Carter Page based on the ostensibly specious Steele dossier. This is the one case unique in coming to light among tens of thousands of FISA surveillances cloaked forever in secrecy, given that the FISA system lacks the checks on abusive authority that inherently exist in the criminal justice process, and so the Page case is instructive to learn how the sausage really gets made.

Neither the liberal adulation of Mueller nor the unquestioned credibility accorded Steele by the FBI seem warranted by the facts. It is fair for Americans to ask whether Mueller’s investigation would have ever happened if not for his FBI successor James Comey having signed off on the investigation triggered by the Steele dossier, which was paid for by the Clinton campaign to dig up dirt on her opponent.

In any event, please spare us the solicitations of these political NGOs’ “national mobilization” to protect Mueller. There are at least a million attorneys in this country who do not suffer from the significant conflicts of interest that Robert Mueller has with key witnesses like his close, long-term colleague James Comey and other public officials involved in the investigation.

And, at the end of the day, there are far more important issues to be concerned about than the “integrity” of the Mueller investigation – one being the need to fix FISA court abuses and restoring constitutional rights.

Coleen Rowley, a retired FBI special agent and division legal counsel whose May 2002 memo to then-FBI Director Robert Mueller exposed some of the FBI’s pre-9/11 failures, was named one of TIME magazine’s “Persons of the Year” in 2002.

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