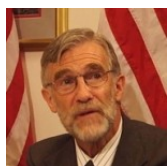


Justice Dept Likely to Slow-Walk Declassification

President Trump has ordered Russia-gate data to be declassified but will likely be stonewalled, raising questions about whether Trump is his own man, writes Ray McGovern.

By Ray McGovern

Special to Consortium News



Don't hold your breath. While the media is breathlessly describing yesterday's order by President Donald Trump's "to provide for the **immediate** (emphasis added) declassification" of Russia-gate materials as a "showdown," any likely showdown is months away, if it comes at all.

The word "immediate" can mean different things to different people. Had the President set a deadline, or had he given the declassification task to his own National Security Council, the word "showdown" might be closer to what to expect.

The tragic-comedy now on stage in Washington is beyond bizarre. Can President Trump be unaware that those he "ordered" to do the declassification – top officials of the Justice Department, the FBI, and the intelligence agencies – have zero incentive to comply "immediately." And they have minus-zero incentive, as the top echelons see it, to throw their former bosses, colleagues, and co-conspirators under the bus by releasing the family jewels.

Most of today's commentary by anonymous officials on declassification are transparently bogus. To suggest, for example, that "death could occur," as one MSNBC pundit predicted this afternoon, is beyond ludicrous. Do not expect Establishment media, however, to stop its feeding frenzy at the Deep State trough.

Stakes High For Russia-gate Pundits

The stakes could hardly be higher not only for the Deep State, but also for the media – including erstwhile "progressive" pundits not yet recovered, after 22 months, from the virulent virus I call "HWHW" (Hillary Would Have Won). Observations by Mark Twain and, more recently, Patrick Lawrence apply in spades to the widely shared predicament of Russia-gate. Twain: "It is easier to fool people than to convince them that they have been fooled."

Lawrence put it this way in Consortium News: "The most ordinary standards of

evidentiary procedure are forgone. Many of our key institutions—the foreign policy apparatus, the media, key intelligence and law-enforcement agencies, the political leadership—are now extravagantly committed to a narrative none appears able to control. The risk of self-inflicted damage these institutions assume, should the truth of the Russia-gate events emerge—as one day it surely will—is nearly incalculable. ... Russia-gate, in a phrase, has become too big to fail.”

Trump has now put the ball in the miscreants’ court but, with the media on their side, Deep State functionaries enjoy the equivalent of home-court advantage. House Intelligence Committee Chair Devin Nunes (R, CA) has pretty much warned of this. Speaking of classified passages Trump has now ordered released, Nunes in late July expressed hedged confidence “that once the American people see these 20 pages, **at least for those that will get real reporting on this issue**, (emphasis added) they will be shocked by what’s in that FISA [Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act] application” to surveil Carter Page, an American citizen, and member of Trump’s campaign team.

Sure, Nunes is a Trump supporter. But he also has this strange – these days one might say romantic – notion that the way the U.S. Constitution set things up, he and his committee have the power – and the duty – to oversee the agencies that Congress established and funds, and to uncover any abuses. The behavior of the chairs of the House Judiciary and Oversight Committees shows they share that view.

On February 18, Nunes threw down a heavy gauntlet during an interview with journalist Sheryl Attkisson:

“FISA abuse ... as it relates to the Department of Justice and the FBI, if they need to be put on trial, we will put them on trial. The reason that Congress exists is to oversee these agencies that we created. DOJ and FBI are not above the law. Congress created them, we oversee them, and we fund them. And if they’re committing abuse for a secret court, getting warrants on American citizens, you’re darn right that we’re going to put them on trial.”

Trump Agonistes

Nunes put that on the record back in February. What can possibly explain Trump’s reluctance to order declassification of relevant FISA and other documents (with such redactions that might be truly necessary) until seven months later, and just seven weeks before the mid-term elections? And why did Trump throw down a cautious, paper-thin gauntlet, with no firm deadline – inviting Deep State stonewalling?

The need to play ball with the Deep State is normally made clear to incoming presidents before they are inaugurated, and such was the case with President-elect Trump. Just two weeks before he took office, Trump was paid an official visit by National Intelligence Director James Clapper, FBI Director James Comey, CIA Director John Brennan, and NSA Director Michael Rogers. Trump was put on notice by none other than the Minority Leader of the Senate, Chuck Schumer. Schumer has been around and knows the ropes; he is a veteran of 18 years in the House, and is in his 20th year in the Senate.

On Jan. 3, 2017 Schumer said it all, when he told MSNBC's Rachel Maddow, that President-elect Trump is "being really dumb" by taking on the intelligence community and its assessments on Russia's cyber activities:

"Let me tell you, you take on the intelligence community, they have six ways from Sunday at getting back at you," Schumer told Maddow. "So even for a practical, supposedly hard-nosed businessman, he's being really dumb to do this." Did Maddow ask Schumer if he was saying the President of the United States should be afraid of the intelligence community? No, she let Schumer's theorem stand.

Three days after the Schumer-Maddow warning, at the January 6 meeting with the Deep State brass, Trump was handed an evidence-free, rump intelligence "assessment" – published the same day – that Russian President Vladimir Putin had done what he could to get Trump elected. Adding insult to injury, after the others had left then-FBI Director Comey told the President-elect about the dubious findings of the so-called "Steele dossier," opposition research paid for by the Democrats, with unconfirmed but scurrilous stories about Trump cavorting with prostitutes in Moscow, etc., etc.

Did Trump get the message? Is he his own man? A clue is in the almost embarrassing abundance of caution he has exercised vis-a-vis the Deep State – and the military, as well. He is likely to let himself be slow-walked on declassification past the mid-term elections, after which the scenery is likely to look very different in Congress.

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