

Testimony of Lee Smith
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
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Chairman Johnson, and Ranking Member Peters, thank you for the invitation to speak before the committee. Thanks also to committee members and staff.

Nearly four years ago a series of crimes were committed in full view of the public and to date no one has been charged. It was the one set of crimes inarguably committed during the course of Crossfire Hurricane, the FBI's investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election and the possible involvement of the Trump campaign. The crimes began with the leak from a classified intercept of a telephone conversation between then President-elect Donald Trump's incoming national security advisor Michael Flynn and the Russian ambassador to the United States.

In January and February 2017, the Washington Post published stories sourced to intercepts of Flynn's phone calls and speculated that the retired three-star general might have broken the law by discussing the foreign policy of the United States with foreign officials. For Gen Flynn, it was the beginning of a twisted journey forced upon him by political opponents and professional rivals and ending only last week with a presidential pardon.

For America, those leaks are the centerpiece of one of the most remarkable crime sprees in our history—classified information leaked serially to prestige press organizations for the purpose of prosecuting a campaign of political warfare against a sitting president. Reporters rarely, if ever, actually saw the classified documents — they relied on badly spun accounts of the documents fed to them by a circle of intelligence leakers. The classified information was used to advance the narrative that Trump had been compromised by Russian spies. US officials knew not only that they were breaking the law; they also knew they were marketing a lie, and they knew where it originated.

According to notes taken by former CIA director John Brennan, he briefed then president Barack Obama in late July 2016 that the Hillary Clinton campaign had approved a plan “to vilify Donald Trump by stirring up a scandal claiming interference by Russian security services.” Knowing the purpose and provenance of the story, Brennan nonetheless pushed it to senior US officials as fact. He briefed then Senate minority leader Harry Reid on information drawn from the notorious dossier paid for by the Clinton campaign. Brennan also took it to the FBI. He said that he shared that information regarding Trump aides and Russian officials “with the Bureau so that they could take it.” In sworn testimony before congress in May 2017, the former CIA director said the information he gave to federal law enforcement “serves as the basis for the FBI investigation.”

It was to lend more color and weight to the Russia smear targeting Trump that government officials leaked classified information like the Flynn intercept. None have ever been charged. Rather, figures like Brennan, former FBI director James Comey and deputy director Andrew McCabe have been celebrated in the media, signed to book contracts and

television deals. The press itself was honored. The Washington Post and New York Times were awarded a joint Pulitzer Prize for their numerous stories sourced to classified information leaked to advance a fraudulent narrative.

Because of its part in pushing Russiagate, American intelligence services and law enforcement authorities are regarded with skepticism, if not contempt, by half of the US public. Programs — like foreign intelligence surveillance act warrants, confidential human sources, and classified intelligence— designed to keep citizens safe from terrorism, organized crime, and adversarial states were turned against Americans who were simply practicing their right to participate in our political process. Senior US officials have therefore not only endangered our national security but more crucially have squandered the confidence once invested in them by their fellow Americans. As a consequence, millions of Americans believe that the FBI's chief mission now is to twist our political system to the advantage of its political masters.

And thus the Crossfire Hurricane investigation marks a new, even transitional, moment in our history. I lived in and reported from the Middle East for more than a decade, and the shape of the FBI and media's joint operation is unmistakable. It signals the marriage of the ministry of the interior (responsible for domestic spying) to the ministry of information (responsible for manufacturing propaganda) in a combined effort to destroy anyone it perceives as an opponent. With Crossfire Hurricane, major American institutions, the press and our intelligence community, have adopted the practices and ethos of the Third World. It is not clear at present how we might return from that territory.

The issue then is not simply that the press and our intelligence services have forfeited the faith of large parts of the US public, but that they have injected into our public sphere a conspiracy theory. What they've done is the equivalent of dumping mercury into every American river, lake, and reservoir.

It is difficult to foresee the precise consequences of what began four years ago and predict how it may continue to poison American minds and twist our politics into dark obscurantism. The fear is that we may soon come to learn the lesson that Americans had previously understood only indirectly, only by reflecting on the fate of foreign nations broken by their sick belief systems, cruel politics, and the sadistic ease with which warlords and ideologues turned communities, neighbors, friends, and families against each other: Those who can be convinced of the most monstrous lies can be persuaded to believe anything, and to act on it.