

Surveillance State Goes After Trump

Democrats are so eager to take down President Trump that they are joining forces with the Surveillance State to trample the privacy rights of people close to Trump, ex-FBI agent Coleen Rowley tells Dennis J Bernstein.

By Dennis J Bernstein

Since Donald Trump's election, former Special FBI Agent Coleen Rowley has been alarmed over how Democratic hawks, neocons and other associates in the "deep state" have obsessed over "resurrecting the ghost of Joseph McCarthy" and have built political support for a permanent war policy around hatred of Russia.

Rowley, whose 2002 memo to the FBI Director exposed some of the FBI's pre-9/11 failures, compared the current anti-Russia hysteria to "the

'Red Scare' fear of Communism" famously associated with legendary FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover who collaborated with Sen. Joe McCarthy's hunt for disloyal Americans in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

In an interview, Rowley told me that while Trump was wrong about his claim that President Obama ordered a surveillance "tapp" of Trump Tower, the broader point may have been correct as explained by House Intelligence Chairman Devin Nunes, R-California, who described how U.S. intelligence apparently picked up conversations by Trump associates while monitoring other targets.

Dennis Bernstein: A former high-level FBI whistleblower says Trump is vindicated on his claims of being surveilled by the previous administration. Joining us to take a close look at what's been going on, what's been unfolding in Washington, D.C. is Coleen Rowley. She's a former FBI special agent and division council. She wrote a May 2002 memo to the FBI director that exposed some of the FBI's pre-9/11 failures, major failures. She was Time magazine's person of the year in 2002. ... Help us explain what chairman Nunes reported in terms of the collecting process and Trumps innocence or guilt?

Coleen Rowley: I think the Chairman Nunes said [Wednesday] that Trump was monitored instead of wiretapped. And these are terms of art that for three weeks or so, no one has fully understood and so there's been all this confusion. Trump, himself, did not understand, and was clumsy in saying "my campaign was wiretapped." Wiretapping itself is almost obsolete. It means tapping into a wire, that's the old way, when the way communications used to go over wires and now they're digital and they... Snowden, if you remember, all of the disclosures from Edward Snowden, and other NSA whistleblowers, there's something going on

now called collect it all, massive surveillance. And that is done, there are some targets, but then lots and lots of Americans are incidentally monitored... they aren't monitored but their conversations, and their phone numbers that they're dialing and their e-mails that they're e-mailing are collected.

And, of course, when Trump was under investigation it would be natural that they would have some... not his... not necessarily him personally, but his campaign staff obviously, that's going to mean surveillance of those people.

DB: Now, monitoring, does that mean that Obama was in fact, surveilling? Is that a good word? Was Trump being surveilled? Were his claims essentially correct?

CR: I think Trump is vindicated, again he didn't understand the terms that he was using. And he did misuse the term, so when Comey said "No"... that that tweet about being wiretapped, we have found no evidence of that." Comey was able to be honest because a wiretap has a specific meaning. But, you notice, in five hours Comey never said that there's been no surveillance of anyone connected to the Trump campaign. In fact, he implied the opposite. He implied that the Trump campaign, some persons, he didn't mention names, but some of them have been investigated since this summer.

And, so, obviously that does mean that, for starters, if you think... remember all of the disclosures from Edward Snowden and the other NSA whistleblowers, they can access all of the communications that have already been collected. That's for starters, so if you have somebody that you are now investigating, you can go back into these NSA databases and say pull up everything on so-and-so. And I've just got to add one more thing, the NSA whistleblowers including Edward Snowden all warned for really now for two or three years, we have been warning the American public that this "collect it all" is really a recipe for, not only a lack of privacy, but even for hurting our own democracy.

If you go back to Frank Church, for instance, the reason the Church committee... well it was because Frank Church, Senator Frank Church was, himself, under surveillance by the NSA. And we warned now for two or three years, that they tell the public "Don't worry, you have nothing to hide. Why would you worry about any of these NSA... they're helping us catch terrorists. And you don't have anything to hide."

But, of course, the politicians in Washington are the ones that have things to hide. They could have conflicts of interests, there's all kinds of things going on, certainly just political opposition, partisanship. So this is always an ongoing game in Washington, to try to find out dirt about your opponent, etc. So, they are the ones, actually, who should have been more aware of how this could be used against themselves. And yet, they just disregarded these warnings

and told the public "Oh, don't worry you have nothing to hide."

DB: We've got Donald Trump vindicated about, in essence, being monitored, surveilled. without his own knowledge although I would imagine he should have known, or assumed. But now that tells us that there has been a lot of information collected and we can now assume, I guess, that all the... a lot of the communications from the Trump people, in Washington, also, at Trump Tower, so even though it wasn't wiretapped, it was monitored.

CR: It was collected. And, again, this isn't necessarily about Trump personally, just cause it's not about Obama, personally ordering. What this is about is if there are even members of Trump's campaign staff, or even associates, that could even be a little bit distant from the actual campaign, but just associates. It may be that they were the actual targets. And, still, might be the targets. But, then incidentally Trump could have ended up being, himself, intercepted.

I'm going to go back to Martin Luther King, Jr.. Martin Luther King, Jr., if you understand the microphones in his hotels. And he was the subject of Title 3 orders. This was all based on guilt by association. And I think it was simply a paragraph or two, there was very little probable cause. It was a paragraph or two alleging that an associate or a cousin of an associate was a communist. That's what it amounted to. And that's how, then, J.Edgar Hoover was allowed to go and do all these things in hotel rooms. And, in the same era, the NSA was actually monitoring Senator Frank Church.

We think after all these years that we've grown up and we've understood the problems that occurred back then. And, obviously, history is totally repeating. It may well be there's a legitimate investigation of somebody in the periphery of the Trump campaign, a staffer or somebody connected, that's legitimate.

But when they have a "collect it all" motto which they've had now since 9/11. They've turned on these monitoring things, Hayden and others turned them right on, illegally, I should say, for starters, illegally. And now they have all this database. And, so, there's only a couple of ways to try to protect privacy. And they are supposed to be on their honor to minimize Americans.

And you now see that this has completely failed in the case of Flynn and others, because, again, that's all they have is on their honor, they say they won't leak out identities of Americans if they are "incidentally" collected. And, now, that doesn't even apply. And, I would say that the people who have leaked are not – I've said this many times now – are not what I would term a good whistleblower.

These are leakers who seem to be high level, as opposed to somebody like Edward Snowden or Chelsea Manning, at a lower level, who is motivated for the public

good. I think that the leaks that you've seen in the past couple of months, or three months, have actually come from high levels, top appointees, and political partisanship are the motivations. They're not saying this is for the public good. And, again, this is something we all warned about, the NSA and our veteran intelligence professionals for sanity probably have written half a dozen times, about these problems. And, now it's just really all happened the way we predicted and warned about.

DB: Now, we have, sort of, a hundred, almost smoking guns. I want to ask you Coleen Rowley, as somebody who has been... worked for the FBI, evaluated information, collected information, you're an attorney in this context. In terms of what we know. Do they got Donald Trump? Is he owned by the Russians? What have you been able to confirm?

CR: Well, I don't think there has... and it's not just myself, it's really most of our veteran intelligence professionals, retired CIA, retired NSA, we've all been conferring for a while on this. And we have asked, we actually put out a...memo asking for evidence. Because it's just been assertions and innuendoes, and demonization...

We see a lot of demonization of the Russian T.V. channel. But we have not seen any actual evidence of Russians... and there's a lot of reasons to think that this would be illogical. Even if, and I would grant that Comey mentioned this in his testimony, that Putin and other top Russians hated Hillary Clinton. Well, even if you assume that, that they didn't like Hillary Clinton, as much as Donald Trump. They considered Donald Trump their lesser evil, or whatever. Even if you think that, why would they take the risk? Because, at the time Hillary Clinton surprised everyone by... everyone thought she was going to win. So it would have been completely illogical for them to have done these things, to take that kind of a risk, when it was presumed that she was going to be the next president. There's just so many things here that don't add up, and don't make sense.

And yet, and yet, because our mainstream media is owned by what?...half a dozen big conglomerates, all connected to the military industrial complex, they continue with the scenario of that old movie... the Russians are coming!...the Russians are coming! And unfortunately the Democrat Party has become the war party, very clearly. They're the ones that don't see the dangers in ginning up this very dangerous narrative of going after Russia, as meddling, or whatever. And they should ask for, we all should ask for the full evidence of this. If this is case, then we deserve to know the truth about it. And, so far, we haven't seen anything. Look at that report. There's nothing in it.

DB: And, this is the same media who for the last... ever since Trump claimed that he was wiretapped using the wrong terminology, these

journalists they couldn't stop saying "if he did lie, this is a felony. He did lie. He did accuse the former president of the United States..." So, you're saying, based on your long experience and information this was just a confusion of a term of art, and the idea of the possibility of Trump Towers being under investigation, this was all incredibly not strange, not crazy, and totally normal in the context of an investigation.

CR: Yes, and I again, there could be grounds for legitimate investigation of the periphery of the Trump campaign, certain staffers. And you know what, corruption in Washington, D.C. is quite rampant. And I think many, many of the politicians if they actually put them under the microscope they could find... just as you look at foreign leaders, Netanyahu was indicted for corruption, whatever. It's not uncommon to have conflicts of interests, and under the table deals. That's very possible.

So, that's not what our news is saying. Our mainstream news is saying that, what you said at the beginning, the Russians own Trump, and basically that this has undermined our democracy and our electoral process. That part of it we have seen no evidence of. And, Trump is partially vindicated, because obviously whether he was personally targeted, his campaign at least seems to have been monitored, at least in part.

DB: Were you amazed that, for instance, the FBI director raised the issue of the Clinton investigation, but not the Trump investigation?

CR: Well, I've been trying to figure that out. Because back, during ... when he went public, he was put into the spot because Loretta Lynch should have been the one to be public on these things. But she was tainted because of having met with Bill Clinton on the tarmac. And so my explanation was that that Comey shouldered the burden from Loretta Lynch. He was doing her a favor in a way because he thought it would look like this is more independent and more professional coming from the FBI. Because at the time Loretta Lynch was under a cloud. And I think that is the explanation for why he was so public at the time.

And, of course, things have developed... the summer, if any investigation started during the summer, again, it was not known. It was probably legitimate if they got some information in about some act of corruption, or whatever, it was certainly legitimate. But since this summer what has happened is this whole narrative has just gone on steroids, because of the leaks about the Russians, etc. And the fact that they put out this report, the FBI, the NSA, and the director of National Intelligence. And I think that that's the problem right now is the public just is so confused because there has been so much wrong information out there in the media. And no one knows what to believe.

Actually, to Comey's credit he did say this a couple of times that these media accounts are not accurate. And, I think that, again, we... there's been a lot of "sources" anonymous sources which I do not think are whistleblowers. But these anonymous sources seem to have come from political operatives, and even higher level people. I'm guessing some of this came from the Obama administration appointees, not Obama, of course, personally.

And, who knows if he knew anything about this, but some of those prior appointees, I think, when all is said and done will be seen as the ones, if they can ever uncover this. It's hard with anonymous sources. But I think they were probably the ones leading this. And maybe over time we can get back to some sanity here without so much of this planted information, and wrongful leaks. And I, again, I'm all for whistle blowing. But, I don't agree with leaks like Scooter Libby's where they were actually using the media to plant false info.

Dennis J Bernstein is a host of "Flashpoints" on the Pacifica radio network and the author of Special Ed: Voices from a Hidden Classroom. You can access the audio archives at www.flashpoints.net.
