


Substantial Disruption



The Nunes Memo and Trump's Greatest Fear

By Mike Tully

The [Nunes memo](#) was not just a “nothing burger,” it was a double-whopper nothing burger that drew derision and disdain. It’s a pundit’s piñata, with commentators hammering the memo and its hyperventilating advocates. MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” program aired a [video mashup](#) comparing the hype over the memo to Geraldo Rivera’s “Al Capone’s vault” fiasco, featuring horse poop hucksters like [Sean Hannity](#), who said the memo uncovered “the biggest abuse of power ... in American history.” That’s like conflating a sex fantasy with syphilis (Capone sub-reference intended). But the memo might inadvertently suggest Donald Trump’s greatest fear.

The memo is not only insubstantial, it’s illogical. Nunes claims the FBI submitted a misleading declaration to surveil Carter Page, a foreign policy advisor on Trump’s campaign team. He alleges the FBI failed to disclose that some of the evidence in the declaration came from a source funded by the Clinton Campaign and the Democratic National Committee (DNC). “I don’t believe that somebody like Mr. Page should be a target of the FBI,” [Nunes told Trump News](#), “especially using salacious information paid for by a political campaign...” The “salacious information” is in a [dossier](#) prepared by former MI6 agent [Christopher Steele](#), who had been hired by research firm Fusion GPS to investigate Trump’s Russian connections.

Nunes [impeached his own memo](#) on “Fox and Friends,” when he conceded a footnote in the warrant application stated the information was paid for by a political entity, although it did not specifically mention the Clinton Campaign or DNC. Nunes called that a material omission that misled the court. Isn’t it likely the court might have suspected the Clinton Campaign and DNC? If the court wanted to learn the identities of the funding source, all it had to do was ask – which it probably did. The memo is based on a premise that its primary author admits is flawed.

Page is unquestionably “somebody (who) should be a target of the FBI.” He showed up on their radar in 2013, when they warned him he was being recruited by a Russian spy. One of Page’s Russian connections was eventually tried and imprisoned for espionage. That would motivate most Americans to avoid contact with Russians, but not Page. Only months after the FBI met with him, [Page wrote](#), “I have had the privilege to serve as an informal advisor to the staff of the Kremlin.” The FBI first obtained an eavesdropping warrant against Page in 2013. Page maintained his Russian contacts in March of 2016, when he was [appointed to Trump’s campaign foreign policy team](#) and [bragged in December of that year](#), “I’ve certainly been in a number of meetings with (Trump).” In July, 2016, while still serving on Trump’s campaign team, Page [gave a speech in Moscow](#) criticizing “Washington and other Western capitals” for “their often-hypocritical focus on ideas such as democratization, inequality, corruption and regime change.” The FBI reopened its investigation into Page after his Moscow speech and he resigned from the campaign in September of 2016. When Nunes claims Page, a man with links to Russian government spies, who gave a speech critical of his own country while serving as a presidential campaign advisor, is not somebody who should interest the FBI, he has escaped the gravitational pull of Planet Logic.

So why did Nunes and Trump – who claims the Nunes memo [vindicates](#) him – rely on a sketchy character like Carter Page? That makes no logical sense, until you consider that Page opens the door to attack the Steele dossier and, by extension, Mueller’s investigation. Page and former Campaign Chairman Paul Manafort are the only Americans mentioned in the dossier known to have been the subject of foreign intelligence eavesdropping warrants connected to Mueller’s investigation. Manafort, under indictment, is even sketchier than Page, who is not consequential to the scheme; Trump’s target is the Dossier. What is it about the Dossier that worries him?

It’s unlikely to be the “salacious” portion, a report that the Kremlin has videotapes of Trump engaged in acts of sexual perversion with government-paid prostitutes. That information is not verified and never will be, because the Russians need their blackmail victims to believe them. Blackmailers are most effective when they can demonstrate they will conceal damaging information as long as the blackmail target cooperates. If the “salacious” video exists and the Russians disclose it, they would compromise future blackmail attempts because the victims would not trust their promise to withhold damaging information in return for cooperation. The tape is not getting out.

The danger to Trump lies in Steele’s reference to payments to Internet hackers. The hackers who stole emails from Clinton and the DNC are not all spit-and-polish military operatives – many are criminals, who are in it for the pay. They are paid to conduct the hacking and paid to keep quiet afterward. And Steele says Trump contributed to the payments. Put aside concerns about the Trump Tower meeting and phony *Facebook* bots. The strongest case against Trump will be built by following the money. That’s why Mueller has gone after Trump-related financial records at [Deutsche Bank](#). The strongest case against Trump will not be based on witness testimony, which is not always reliable or credible. It will be based on checks and ledgers, the green-shade forensics that Mueller’s team understands better than anybody. Witnesses forget details. Ledgers and spreadsheets have impeccable memories.

Trump is not fixated on Steele because of a videotape. He’s afraid of the money trail that can tie him to the Russian hackers. If such a money trail exists, Mueller’s team will find it and Trump’s allies and sycophants will disappear like frost in May.