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According to a report issued by the Justice's Office of the Inspector General released last week, the FBI's investigation of the 2016 Trump campaign's possible connections with the Russian government was justified and not driven by political bias. However, they also found the investigation was full of blunders and bad omissions that lead to some pretty serious civil liberty violations.

- As described by Scott Shackford of Reason, "The report analyzes the circumstances under which the FBI asked the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Amendment (FISA) courts for permission to secretly wiretap Carter Page, a foreign policy advisor in Trump's campaign. FBI officials were concerned Page might be compromised or working as a foreign agent, and they sought and received permission to wiretap him, permission they renewed three times."
  - The FBI's requests to the FISA court relied partly on a dossier alleging that Russian officials had compromising info on Trump - a dossier the former British spy Christopher Steele had developed as a political weapon. That raised the question of whether the FISA court had received an adequate explanation about the dossier's roots and credibility.
- The report states, "Our review found that FBI personnel fell far short of the requirement in FBI policy that they ensure that all factual statements in a FISA application are "scrupulously" accurate. We identified multiple instances in which factual assertions relied upon in the first FISA application were inaccurate, incomplete, or unsupported by appropriate documentation, based upon information the FBI had in its possession at the time the application was filed."
  - The IG office found seven problems with the very first FISA warrant application. These included: leaving out the fact that Page in the past had provided the FBI with information about his contacts with Russian intelligence officers; overstating the degree that Steele's prior reporting had been used in criminal proceedings; omitting information from Steele himself that one of his sources was prone to boasting and may have some credibility issues; incorrectly claiming that Steele wasn't the source of a leak of his information to Yahoo News; and even omitting some comments from consensual interviews with Page where he denied having met certain Russian officials. The errors were not corrected in the renewal applications.
    - The IG report noted that the FBI was unable to corroborate any of the information about Page that was in the Steele report, even as they kept seeking renewal of the wiretapping and Page has not been charged with any crimes.
  - Altogether, the IG found 17 incidents of "serious performance failures by the supervisory and non-supervisory agents with responsibility over the FISA applications." but they were still able to conclude there was no political bias.
- The findings in this report undercut the government's position that FISA courts are a sufficient guardian of Americans' civil liberties and that the FBI is capable of responsibly

exercising the vast powers granted to it. No one should feel confident that a court would block the FBI from engaging in surveillance, even if the information was flawed.

- If this hadn't happened in such a high-profile case involving the current president, would we have even known about this?
- A spokesperson for the FBI said the report "does not impugn the FBI's institutional integrity. It doesn't doubt - or propose any changes to - the FBI's mission or our core values. It doesn't criticize - or even question - the brand that this organization has earned over 111 years."
- Justice Department Inspector General Michael Horowitz also announced in the report plans to conduct an additional audit to determine how well the FBI follows proper procedures when requesting permission from the secretive FISA Court to surveil American citizens.
  - "Given the extensive compliance failures we identified in this review, we believe that additional OIG oversight work is required to assess the FBI's compliance with Department and FBI FISA-related policies that seek to protect the civil liberties of US persons. Accordingly, we have today initiated an OIG audit that will further examine the FBI's compliance with the Woods Procedures in FISA application that target US persons in both counterintelligence and counterterrorism investigations"
  - The Woods procedures describe the lengthy process FBI officials are supposed to go through when submitting a request for a FISA application to make sure every factual piece of information had been properly vetted and verified. It is supposed to be a painstaking process of dotting every i and crossing every t to get permission to use the FISA court to secretly surveil an American citizen on American soil.
    - Former FBI agent Asha Rangappa explained in 2017 how difficult it was supposed to be to get a FISA warrant to wiretap Carter Page. The FBI should not have casually gotten permission to spy on Page for political purposes.
- The ACLU issued a statement voicing their concerns about this IG report saying:
  - "...For instance, the litany of problems with the Carter Page surveillance applications demonstrates how the secrecy shrouding the government's one-sided FISA approval process breeds abuse..." "The system requires fundamental reforms, and Congress can start by providing defendants subjected to FISA surveillance the opportunity to review the government's secret submissions. The FBI must also adopt higher standards for investigations involving constitutionally protected sensitive activities, such as political campaigns."
- In early 2018, Republicans and Democrats on the House Intelligence Committee released dueling memos on the FBI's FISA applications.
  - The GOP memo often called the Nunes memo, said that "material and relevant information was omitted" from the applications, including the dossier "formed an

essential part” of the initial application and that there was “minimal” corroboration of the Steele reporting.

- The Democratic memo argued that the GOP memo had omitted key details and twisted facts. “FBI and DOJ officials did not ‘abuse’ the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) process, omit material information or subvert this vital tool to spy on the Trump campaign,” the Democratic memo said. “DOJ met the rigor, transparency, and evidentiary basis needed to meet FISA’s probable cause requirement.”
  - The Democratic memo also said the FBI made “only narrow use of information from Steele’s sources about Page’s specific activities in 2016” and that “senior FBI and DOJ officials have repeatedly affirmed to the Committee the reliability and credibility of Steele’s reporting.
- The MSM has interpreted this IG report as vindication for the FBI seeing the main takeaway as there being no political bias in the FBI’s investigation.
  - Aaron Blake of The Washington Post wrote, [“4 takeaways from the Horowitz report on the Russia investigation”](#) and his number one take was, “A triple rebuke to Trump’s conspiracy theories”
    - He wrote, “There will be plenty of shouting in the hours and days ahead, especially given that Horowitz’s report found some alleged FBI misconduct and omissions. But proponents of the Russia investigation didn’t argue it was flawless. President Trump and his allies, on the other hand, argued it was an unfounded witch hunt and lodged conspiracy theories about how it was an effort to take him down - even a “coup” The Horowitz report, in its core findings, does not back up Trump’s and his allies’ conspiracy theories. In fact, it undercuts a number of them.”
  - [CNN’s article](#) led with “conspiracy theories debunked” and called the Russia probe “legal unbiased” before they conceded serious mistakes by the FBI that the network predominantly attributed to a “low level FBI lawyer”.
    - The article states, “The report accuses a former FBI lawyer of altering a document related to the surveillance of campaign aide Carter Page. But Horowitz did not find that it undermined the overall validity of the surveillance.” They also added, “The report essentially rebuts more than two years of talking points by Trump and Republicans about a deep-state effort to derail his campaign.”
  - The Washington Post also suggests that this report explicitly proves there was no attempt at a “deep state coup”.
    - Trump made a statement saying: *“The report, actually — and especially when you look into it, and the details of the report — are far worse than anything I would have even imagined. ... This was an overthrow of government. This was an attempted overthrow. And a lot of people who were in on it, and they got caught. They got caught red-handed.”*
    - Commenting on this statement, The Washington Post wrote, “Trump sticks with his conspiracy theories. There is nothing in the report that

supports “an overthrow of government.” In fact, as we noted, the IG found that political bias did not factor into the start of the probe. He even turned up text messages of FBI agents hoping Trump would beat Hillary Clinton. In many ways, the IG report would have been disappointing to Trump, yet he gamely suggests it’s even worse than he expected.”

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