

[Spygate: The Inside Story Of How Public Officials Use Taxpayers Resources To Attack Citizens Who Speak Up](#)

BY JEFF CARLSON |

Efforts by high-ranking officials in the CIA, FBI, Department of Justice (DOJ), and State Department to portray President Donald Trump as having colluded with Russia were the culmination of years of bias and politicization under the Obama administration.

The weaponization of the intelligence community and other government agencies created an environment that allowed for obstruction in the investigation into Hillary Clinton and the relentless pursuit of a manufactured collusion narrative against Trump.

A willing and complicit media spread unsubstantiated leaks as facts in an effort to promote the Russia-collusion narrative.

The Spygate scandal also raises a bigger question: Was the 2016 election a one-time aberration, or was it symptomatic of decades of institutional political corruption?

This article builds on dozens of congressional testimonies, court documents, and other research to provide an inside look at the actions of Obama administration officials in the scandal that's become known as Spygate.

To understand this abuse of power, it helps to go back to July 2011, when DOJ Inspector General Michael Horowitz was appointed.

From the very start, Horowitz found his duties throttled by Attorney General Eric Holder, who placed limitations on the inspector general's right to have unobstructed access to information. Holder used this tactic to delay Horowitz's investigation of the failed sting operation known as Operation Fast and Furious.

"We got access to information up to 2010 in all of these categories. No law changed in 2010. No policy changed. ... It was simply a decision by the General Counsel's Office in 2010 that they viewed, now, the law differently. And as a result, they weren't going to give us that information," Horowitz told members of Congress in February 2015.

On Aug. 5, 2014, Horowitz and other inspectors general had sent a letter to Congress asking for unimpeded access to all records. Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates responded on July 20, 2015, with a 58-page memorandum, titled "Memorandum for Sally Quillian Yates Deputy Attorney General," written by Karl R. Thompson, the principal deputy assistant attorney general of the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC).

The July 20, 2015, opinion was widely criticized. But it accomplished what it was intended to do. The opinion limited IG Horowitz's oversight from extending to any information collected under Title III—including intercepted communications and national security letters. (Notably, The New York Times disclosed that national security letters were used in the surveillance of the Trump 2016 presidential campaign.)

In response, on Aug. 3, 2015, IG Horowitz sent a blistering letter to Congress. The letter was signed not only by Horowitz but by all other acting inspectors general as well:

“The OLC opinion’s restrictive reading of the IG Act represents a potentially serious challenge to the authority of every Inspector General and our collective ability to conduct our work thoroughly, independently, and in a timely manner. Our concern is that, as a result of the OLC opinion, agencies other than DOJ may likewise withhold crucial records from their Inspectors General, adversely impacting their work.

Horowitz continued to push Congress for oversight access and encouraged passage of the Inspector General Empowerment Act. Horowitz would ultimately win his battle, but only as President Barack Obama was leaving office. On Dec. 16, 2016, Obama finally signed the Inspector General Empowerment Act into law.

It is against this backdrop of minimal oversight that Spycgate took place.

Ironically, the Clinton email server investigation, known as the “Mid-Year Exam,” originated from a disclosure contained in a June 29, 2015, memo sent by the inspectors general for both the State Department and the Intelligence Community to Patrick F. Kennedy, then-undersecretary of state for management.

The IGs’ memo included an assessment that Clinton’s email account contained hundreds of classified emails, despite Clinton’s claims that there was no classified information present on her server.

On July 6, 2015, the IG for the Intelligence Community made a referral to the FBI, which resulted in the official opening of an investigation into the Clinton email server by FBI officials Randall Coleman and Charles Kable on July 10, 2015.

A Hand-Picked Team

At this time, Peter Strzok was an assistant special agent in charge at the FBI's Washington Field Office. The assistant director in charge at the Washington Field Office during this period was Andrew McCabe, a position he assumed on Sept. 14, 2014.

On July 30, 2015, within weeks of the FBI's opening of the Clinton investigation, McCabe was suddenly promoted to the No. 3 position in the FBI. With his new title of associate deputy director, McCabe was transferred to FBI headquarters from the Washington Field Office, and his direct involvement in the Clinton investigation began.

Strzok would follow shortly. Less than a month after McCabe was transferred, FBI headquarters reached out to the Washington Field Office, saying it needed greater staffing and resources "based on what they were looking at, based on some of the investigative steps that were under consideration," Strzok told congressional investigators in a closed-door hearing on June 27, 2018.

Strzok was one of the agents selected, and in late August 2015, he was assigned to the Mid-Year Exam team and transferred to FBI headquarters. Strzok, in his comments to lawmakers, acknowledged that the newly formed investigative team was largely made up of hand-picked personnel from the Washington Field Office and FBI headquarters.

Starting in October 2015 and continuing into early 2016, FBI Director James Comey made a series of high-profile reassignments that resulted in the complete turnover of the

upper-echelon of the FBI team working on the Clinton email investigation:

- Oct. 12, 2015: Louis Bladel was moved to the New York Field Office.
- Dec. 1, 2015: Randall Coleman, assistant director of Counterintelligence, was named as executive assistant director of the Criminal, Cyber, Response, and Services Branch, and was replaced by Bill Priestap.
- Dec. 9, 2015: Charles “Sandy” Kable was moved to the Washington Field Office.
- Feb. 1, 2016: Mark Giuliano retired as FBI deputy director and was replaced by Andrew McCabe.
- Feb. 11, 2016: John Giacalone retired as executive assistant director and was replaced by Michael Steinbach.
- March 2, 2016: Gerald Roberts, Jr. was moved to the Washington Field Office.

Comey is the only known senior FBI leadership official who remained involved throughout the entire Clinton email investigation. McCabe had the second-longest tenure.

On Jan. 29, 2016, Comey appointed McCabe as FBI deputy director, replacing the retiring Giuliano, and McCabe assumed the No. 2 position in the FBI, after having held the No. 3 position for just six months.

It was at this point that FBI lawyer Lisa Page was assigned to McCabe as his special counsel. This was not the first time that Page worked directly for McCabe. James Baker, the FBI’s former general counsel, told congressional investigators that Page had worked for McCabe at various times during McCabe’s career, going back as far as 2013.

By early 2016, the three participants in the infamous “insurance policy” meeting—McCabe, Strzok, and Page—were now in place at the FBI.

In January 2016, Bill Priestap was named as head of the FBI’s Counterintelligence Division, replacing Coleman and inheriting the Clinton email investigation in the process.

According to Priestap, Coleman had “set up a reporting mechanism that leaders of that team would report directly to him, not through the customary other chain of command” in the Clinton email investigation. Priestap, who said he didn’t know why Coleman had “set it up,” kept the chain of command in place when he assumed Coleman’s position in January 2016.

This new structure resulted in some unusual reporting lines that went outside normal chains of command. Strzok, who would not normally fall under Priestap’s oversight, was now reporting directly to him.

As Priestap described it, the team involved in the Clinton investigation comprised three different but intertwined elements: the primary team, the filter team, and the senior leadership team.

The primary team was small, consisting only of Strzok, FBI analyst Jonathan Moffa, and, to varying degrees, filter team leader Rick Mains and FBI lawyer Sally Moyer. Mains reported to Strzok and Moffa, who in turn, along with Moyer, provided briefings to Priestap.

Below Strzok and Moffa was the day-to-day investigative “filter” team of approximately 15 FBI agents and analysts that was

overseen by Mains, a supervisory special agent.

The senior leadership team was more fluid, consisting of higher-level FBI officials who provided briefings and updates to Comey and/or McCabe. In addition to Priestap, Strzok, and Moffa, frequent attendees included Moyer, Page, Deputy General Counsel Trisha Anderson, chief of staff Jim Rybicki, and General Counsel James Baker.

While the elements of the day-to-day investigative team differed for the Clinton email investigation and the Trump–Russia investigation, the primary team remained the same throughout both cases—as did the lines of communication between the FBI and the DOJ. According to testimony by Page, John Carlin, who ran the DOJ’s National Security Division (NSD), was receiving briefings on both investigations directly from McCabe.

Priestap Left in the Dark

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