



Friday, June 9, 2017

## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF COMEY'S TESTIMONY

### Bottom Line Up Front:

- On June 8, former FBI Director Jim Comey testified under oath that he believed President Trump had fired him because of the ongoing investigation into Russia's interference in the election.
- Comey also testified that he went public with his concerns in the hopes that a special counsel would be appointed.
- Lost in the partisan reactions in Washington is the underlying reality of the issue, which is entirely unprecedented in American history.
- There appears to be little political or ethical misconduct that cannot be dismissed as 'fake' or meaningless news.

**In one of the most highly anticipated political events** in recent memory, former FBI Director James Comey testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on June 8 about the [circumstances surrounding his ouster](#) and his communications with President Donald Trump. The reactions to Comey's unprecedented sworn testimony have divided almost entirely down party lines, with the underlying facts of what was said lost in the talking points. The former FBI director testified under oath that he believed President Trump had fired him in an effort to relieve pressure he was feeling from the [FBI investigation Comey was leading](#) into Russia's efforts to influence the [2016 U.S. presidential election](#), and any possible collusion between the Trump campaign and the Russians. Comey testified that his belief was predicated on President Trump's own words; Trump has stated publicly in a television interview that he fired Comey because of the Russia investigation, after several other conflicting reasons had been offered by his own administration. Comey also explained to members of the committee why

he had developed the practice of documenting in detail all of his conversations with President Trump, pointing to his concern that the president would lie about the nature of their meetings and conversations—a concern Comey stated he had never had when dealing with previous presidents from either party.

When one puts aside the partisanship, it is hard to deny the significance of a former FBI director who had served presidents of both parties, and who has a 30-year record of integrity throughout his service to the country, testifying under oath that the President of the United States told him he ‘hoped’—which Comey understood to be a direction—that Comey would drop the investigation into retired [Lt. General Michael Flynn](#). The partisan reaction immediately devolved to whether the word ‘hope’ was sufficiently authoritative to be possible obstruction of justice when uttered by the president—who framed the conversation on the need for Comey’s loyalty. Yet, throughout the unrelenting political drama that has unfolded since President Trump took office, the far more significant issue that—for the first time in U.S. history—the FBI is investigating the extent of interference by a hostile foreign power in a U.S. election, as well as inappropriate and possibly illegal contacts between senior members of the Trump campaign and administration with the same hostile foreign power, has somehow been relegated to background noise.

The depth of the damage being done to the [foundational assumptions of American democracy](#)—which include, among other truths, that there is such thing as honorable government service that defies partisanship—was a constant thread during Comey’s testimony. Comey testified that he had orchestrated a release to the press of his notes about the meeting with President Trump in which the president asked—or indicated his ‘hope’—that Comey drop the Flynn investigation. This became an immediate talking point by many who labeled it yet another illegal leak of classified information by a vast conspiracy against President Trump; the president’s personal lawyer characterized it this way in his response. That characterization is entirely inaccurate, however; the information was neither classified nor privileged communication, and the White House did not attempt to exert the claim of executive privilege.

Comey stated he went public with his written notes because of President Trump’s public statements after he [fired Comey in early May](#), and stated he had hoped the public disclosure would lead to the appointment of a special counsel to oversee the Russia investigation. He testified that he believed President Trump ‘defamed’ the FBI when the president stated that the nation’s leading law enforcement agency was poorly led and happy to see Comey go; President Trump has also repeatedly tweeted that the FBI was pursuing fake news by looking into Russian interference. The overwhelming consensus by the U.S. government—which has been maintained by the leaders of Trump’s own intelligence community—is that

Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election is absolutely not fake news. A hallmark of American government is that no agency or official is above reproach or honest criticism. Yet the blatant smearing of the abilities, intentions, and loyalties of people serving honorably to uphold the U.S. constitution has become a new reality in U.S. politics. The implications for the foundations of these agencies and organizations—and resulting mistrust of Americans who are more interested in honest service to their country than party politics—is among the greatest national security threats the U.S. currently faces.

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