

SOME COVER-UPS ARE MORE EQUAL THAN OTHER COVER-UPS

Over at TNR, I've got a piece that mocks how former top spooks and officials pretend the partisanship of HPSCI is anything new.

On Monday, Republicans on the House Intelligence Committee released what it claimed to be a summary of its investigation into Russia's role in the election. Among its conclusions, it disagreed with the intelligence community's 2017 assessment that Vladimir Putin and the Russian government "developed a clear preference" for candidate Trump.

The summary, presumably drafted by aides of Trump transition official and committee Chairman Devin Nunes, disputed that assessment even in the face of the recent indictment of Russian internet trolls, which laid out how they set up anti-Hillary and pro-Trump campaign rallies. The indictment also showed how their social media activity pursued the same anti-Hillary, pro-Trump line, launching hashtags like #TrumpTrain and #Hillary4Prison, the Twitter account March for Trump, and the Facebook accounts Clinton FRAUDation and Trumpsters United.

Even some Republicans on the committee have delicately distanced themselves from the report. Trey Gowdy of South Carolina affirmed that Russia was "motivated in whole or in part by a desire to harm [Hillary Clinton's] candidacy or undermine her Presidency had she prevailed." Florida's Tom Rooney, like Gowdy retiring after this term, said, "I absolutely think there

was evidence they were trying to help Trump at some points.”

The report also garnered criticism from former spooks and top officials. John McLaughlin, CIA’s deputy director during the first years of the George W. Bush administration, **complained** on Twitter about the partisan nature of the stunt.

As a subject or observer of Cong oversight of intell for 40 years, I’ve never seen a party drive a stake thru the process as House Reps just did. It depends on a bi-partisan approach that at least gives the minority a voice. Take that away and the thing dies. It just did.

So did Obama-era Attorney General Eric Holder:

Republican House Intell Comm shut down Russia probe before doing a complete job This is a coverup and a lasting stain on the reputation of what used to be a bipartisan Committee when it was run by Republican Rogers and Democrat Ruppertsberger. Politics beat a desire for the truth

Only, McLaughlin has seen such partisanship in congressional oversight before—when he benefited from it. In 2003, after Republicans regained the majority in the Senate, Senate Intelligence Committee Chair Pat Roberts agreed with the CIA to shut down initial efforts by his Democratic predecessor, Bob Graham, to oversee Bush’s torture program. The CIA memorandum of his briefing recorded, “[T]he Senator interjected that he saw no reason for the Committee to pursue such a request and could think of ‘ten reasons right off why it is a terrible idea’ for the

Committee to do any such thing," like observing interrogation as practiced in person. In the same period, Jane Harmon, then the ranking member of House Intelligence Committee, asked the CIA general counsel, "Have enhanced techniques been authorized and approved by the president?" In response, he gave her an evasive answer.

If partisanship drives a stake through effective oversight of the intelligence community, then the efforts to bypass Democratic concerns about torture killed that vampire long ago.

Furthermore, for much of the period that Holder is describing, between 2011 and 2015, Republicans were obsessed with turning the tragedy of the Benghazi assault into a circus. The House Intelligence Committee did its own report on the incident, replete with "additional views" from Rogers offering a sharper attack on the Obama administration, especially Susan Rice. Democrats were left offering "minority views" from Ruppertsberger reminding lawmakers that blame for the attack should lie with the attackers.

I realize, of course, I left something out: that Holder was part of the cover-up himself.

In any case, I otherwise thought it a useful piece.