

There has been so much anxious anticipation of what the Mueller Report would tell us\227at least anticipation of people who care about rule of law. I suspect the number of people who cared would be about the same as those voters who care about foreign policy: ten percent in peaceful times, and 20 percent in times of danger.

I am one of that caring group, and have been since my childhood during World War II, when my father followed events with pins on a world map in our kitchen. As a grownup, I was involved in the Cold War, an editor in the Defense Industry, and later as a professor. I also became an on-the-ground witness to the Iranian Revolution, and the Islamic insurgencies that followed.

Most people are not as obsessed, having little time for anything beyond their work and family responsibilities. However, those families with education and access to newspapers and TV nightly news have tried to follow, and in general, trusted the media to provide the truth. I remember well when TV broadcaster Walter Cronkite was trusted by the nation to tell us "that\222s the way it is" (truth).

Today, we are living in a very different time, and the dangers we face come from within the country (an assault on truth) and globally, with populism assaulting democratic institutions. We are having a crisis of belief, and if demagogues can convince many of us that the trusted sources of fact and analysis purvey "fake news," we have no common base for pursuing responsible governance. Truth has no "alternate truth;" alternate truths are lies.

The Mueller Report is the result of a two-year investigation into a shocking event: a realization that a foreign power, our old nemesis Russia, interfered and possibly skewed our 2016 presidential election. Our Intelligence Community (which today is as trustworthy as any such body can be) found that cyberwar was being used to produce chaos, plant conspiracy theories, and totally manufactured news that were being read by thousands of Americans and re-sent through the social media. This cyberwar and judiciously corrupt uses of money (they even bought off the National Rifle Association) were harnessed to defeat Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and elect Donald Trump.

Even more alarming was the unseemly eagerness of Donald Trump to benefit from this attack. To him and his circle, winning by any means was the goal.

To the astonishment of the world, Donald Trump won the election, an event that almost no one predicted. We found ourselves with a president with no experience in government, none in administration, no knowledge of history or government norms of behavior, and no desire to be guided by government professionals.

When the intelligence community attempted to warn Trump about the Russian interference, he rejected their warning, and surrounded himself before and after the election with people having multiple contacts with Russians. He himself professed that he believed the Russians more than he believed his own intelligence community.

When he fired James Comey, the FBI director, to rid himself of an official not willing to serve him personally, nor to drop charges against Trump\222s National Security Advisor, former General Michael Flynn, a person on the Russian payroll, the FBI began an investigation into Russia\222s campaign to corrupt our democracy. Trump even admitted on a TV interview that his reason for firing Comey was "the Russia thing." He believed that if the Russians were nailed for election interference on his behalf, his legitimacy as president would be ruined.

The Mueller Report has been posted on line. The press did a remarkable job of reading and analyzing its 400 plus pages within a day or two of its release. Most of us will not do this, but if you call up Mueller\222s "Executive Summaries to Volumes I and II, they make very fascinating reading. I did this and can summarize them for you in some detail in my next column. For now, just know that Donald Trump and his circle did not criminally conspire with the Russians, but by any other standard than criminal law, they certainly cooperated.

681 words

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