

May 23, 2013

Roger L. Simon thinks Benghazi is a very serious story.

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The Benghazi scandal, in all probability, would not have happened if the administration and/or the State Department took the War on Terror seriously or even, dare I say it, put the words terrorism and Islamic together in a sentence. But that would break a thousand narratives in the mind of Barack Obama, from his childhood with Frank Marshall Davis until now and back.

So now he is riding the whirlwind. The question is, will he carry us (and Western Civ) with him?

In a long winded piece for the Journal's Best of the Web, James Taranto agrees, but goes further into the other scandals.

Democracy is in peril: That is an emerging theme of the liberal left's response to the Obama scandals. The argument misses the point, no doubt deliberately. What we are witnessing now is not a crisis of democracy but a crisis of authority. The administrative state, in thrall to a decadent cultural elite, has lost the consent of the governed.

"After a week of scandal obsession during which the nation's capital and the media virtually ignored the problems most voters care about--jobs, incomes, growth, opportunity, education--it's worth asking if there is something especially flawed about our democracy," declares the Washington Post's E.J. Dionne.

He goes through a partisan litany of complaints--"a radicalization of conservative politics, over-the-top mistrust of President Obama on the right, high-tech gerrymandering in the House and a Senate snarled by non-constitutional super-majority requirements"--but makes no mention of the abuses of power by the Internal Revenue Service and the Justice Department. He does hint at Benghazi, in his concluding paragraph, but only to pooh-pooh it:

Since World War II, bouts of economic growth have allowed democracies to buy their way out of trouble. One can hope this will happen again--and soon. In the meantime, politicians might contemplate their obligations to stewardship of the democratic ideal. They could begin by pondering what an unemployed 28-year-old makes of a ruling elite that expends so much energy feuding over how bureaucrats rewrote a set of talking points.

But if the purpose of that rewriting was, as it appears to have been, to deceive voters and bolster the president's re-election prospects, then it was a subversion of democracy.

And the IRS scandal was a subversion of democracy on a massive scale. The most fearsome and coercive arm of the administrative state embarked on a systematic effort to suppress citizen dissent against the party in power. Thomas Friedman is famous for musing that he wishes America could be China for a day. It turns out we've been China for a while. ...

Some of the grown-ups in the media are getting the message. Eugene Robinson at WaPo and Howard Fineman at HuffPo have weighed in. Here's the money grafs from Robinson.

The Obama administration has no business rummaging through journalists' phone records, perusing their e-mails and tracking their movements in an attempt to keep them from gathering news. This heavy-handed business isn't chilling, it's just plain cold.

It also may well be unconstitutional. In my reading, the First Amendment prohibition against "abridging the freedom . . . of the press" should rule out secretly obtaining two months' worth of the personal and professional phone records of Associated Press reporters and editors, including calls to and from the main AP phone number at the House press gallery in the Capitol. Yet this is what the Justice Department did.

The unwarranted snooping, which was revealed last week, would be troubling enough if it were an isolated incident. But it is part of a pattern that threatens to redefine investigative reporting as criminal behavior. ...

And from Howard Fineman.

So far, voters don't seem to be abandoning President Barack Obama over controversies gripping the Beltway world. But White House aides are tempting fate with their reluctant, piecemeal and contradictory disclosures of what they knew and when they knew it, especially about a report on the Internal Revenue Service's 18-month effort to target tea party and other conservative groups for special scrutiny.

The aides either have forgotten or are unable to implement the basic lesson of scandal control in Washington: Get the full story out -- all of it -- as fast as you can before your critics accuse you of a cover-up or worse.

It's been only a week since the president told the world that he had learned about the "outrageous" actions of the IRS' Cincinnati office from "news reports" on May 10. We now know that those reports stemmed from a disclosure the administration had planned and that, in fact, "senior officials" in the White House knew the essence of a damning inspector general's report on the matter as early as April 24.

From the start, the White House's response on this potentially explosive matter has been grudging at best and, in retrospect, ignorant or arrogant or both. ...

Jennifer Rubin says the public is getting the message about Benghazi.

The spin that the American people aren't interested in Benghazi or that it's only Republicans who think something is fishy isn't faring too well in a plethora of ... polls.

The GOP figures on all these are off the charts (vs. the administration). But independents are much more like GOP voters than Dems. In some cases, they view the president more harshly.

The newest Post/ABC poll finds: “Last year’s deadly attack on a diplomatic outpost in Benghazi, Libya, is shaping up as a real political problem for President Obama, with concern extending well beyond the conservative base. More than half of Americans say his administration is trying to cover up the facts of the attack.” Asked if the White House is engaged in a cover-up, 56 percent of Republicans and 60 percent of independents say yes. ...

And Ms. Rubin shows how the media are turning against the miscreants. *The Obama administration has a particularly ineffective and ham-handed approach to the media. It has launched an unprecedented attack on journalists, going so far as to label James Rosen’s ordinary newsgathering as criminal. It sought from its first days in office to delegitimize Fox News and limit its press access. It has evaded, delivered half-truths (and smaller fractions) and tried to frustrate mainstream reporters. But as the White House is falling down around its ears, the administration calls in lefty journalists for a private meeting. This is the distillation of “you’re either with us or against us.”*

The strategy is not going so well. Mainstream reporters are lashing out at Jay Carney in the briefing room, while the reporting is generally hard-hitting on the full range of White House scandals. And a chunk of left-of-center pundits is scathing. Dan Pfeiffer’s outing on Sunday was generally panned and earned the White House another four Pinocchios.

Ryan Lizza has added to the reporting on the Rosen case, explaining:

Ronald C. Machen, Jr., the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, who is prosecuting the case, has seized records associated with two phone numbers at the White House, at least five numbers associated with Fox News, and one that has the same area code and exchange as Rosen’s personal-cell-phone number (the last four numbers are redacted).

In all, Ronald C. Machen, Jr., the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, has seized records associated with over thirty different phone numbers. ...

Roger L. Simon
[Benghazi and Going ‘The Full Nixon’](#)

Choosing which is worse between the Benghazi and IRS scandals is probably as much a Rorschach test of the chooser as it is anything else. Both scandals are hugely serious and likely to be with us for a long time.

For me, however, Benghazi is worse, in part because it is easier for some to dismiss and rationalize. Here’s an example of how that’s being done in a rundown of the scandals by John Avlon in the *Telegraph*. After tut-tutting about the seriousness of the IRS scandal (but careful not to go “The Full Nixon” — nothing could be as bad as that), [Avlon writes](#):

Finally, there is the continuing inquiry into the killing of four Americans in Benghazi. After damning congressional testimony from former deputy chief Libya diplomat Greg Hicks, the White House belatedly released a barrage of emails – which showed that the editing of the now-infamous “talking points” used by officials in television interviews was largely the product of a bureaucratic turf war between the CIA and the State Department.

Largely? How about minutely? Even in the relatively small number of emails as yet released, the “limited hangout,” we see the whip hand of administration personnel Ben Rhodes and Tommy Vietor, and also references to the national security staff (NSS) reviewing the material, indicating even more people at the White House were involved.

Whatever minor-league turf wars were being played out, with an ambassador murdered and three other Americans dead, the administration was undoubtedly worried about considerably more than intramural rivalries.

The White House and the State Department were on the brink of serious humiliation before an election. They had screwed up royally. What were they going to say? They had to figure it out and at some point they decided to lie, downplaying the heavily armed terrorist attack and Ansar al Sharia and placing the blame on a video trailer almost no one saw. (For those who missed it, the only place the actual full-length film played was one screening at the Vista Theatre in L.A.’s Silver Lake district. According to an usher, the place was empty.)

Weeks later in front of the UN and on the *Late Show with David Letterman* and even, pathetically, on *The View*, the president was still blaming the terrorist attack on the ludicrous video.

John Avlon may find this largely a turf war. I don’t.

Ironically, good old Bob Schieffer on traditional old CBS seems willing to go further now than Avlon. He really let hapless White House “senior advisor” (he didn’t look very senior to me, but maybe that’s my age) Dan Pfeiffer have it on [Face the Nation](#) Sunday, though Schieffer too could not finally go “The Full Nixon.” For these establishment media-types, nothing and no one will ever be as bad as Tricky Dick and Watergate.

Only in my view (not *The View*), it’s actually worse.

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The Benghazi scandal, in all probability, would not have happened if the administration and/or the State Department took the War on Terror seriously or even, dare I say it, put the words terrorism and Islamic together in a sentence. But that would break a thousand narratives in the mind of Barack Obama, from his childhood with Frank Marshall Davis until now and back.

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WSJ

A Crisis of Authority

The deeper meaning of the Obama scandals.

by James Taranto

Democracy is in peril: That is an emerging theme of the liberal left's response to the Obama scandals. The argument misses the point, no doubt deliberately. What we are witnessing now is not a crisis of democracy but a crisis of authority. The administrative state, in thrall to a decadent cultural elite, has lost the consent of the governed.

"After a week of scandal obsession during which the nation's capital and the media virtually ignored the problems most voters care about--jobs, incomes, growth, opportunity, education--it's worth asking if there is something especially flawed about our democracy," declares the Washington Post's [E.J. Dionne](#).

He goes through a partisan litany of complaints--"a radicalization of conservative politics, over-the-top mistrust of President Obama on the right, high-tech gerrymandering in the House and a Senate snarled by non-constitutional super-majority requirements"--but makes no mention of the abuses of power by the Internal Revenue Service and the Justice Department. He does hint at Benghazi, in his concluding paragraph, but only to pooh-pooh it:

Since World War II, bouts of economic growth have allowed democracies to buy their way out of trouble. One can hope this will happen again--and soon. In the meantime, politicians might contemplate their obligations to stewardship of the democratic ideal. They could begin by pondering what an unemployed 28-year-old makes of a ruling elite that expends so much energy feuding over how bureaucrats rewrote a set of talking points.

But if the purpose of that rewriting was, as it appears to have been, to deceive voters and bolster the president's re-election prospects, then it was a subversion of democracy.

And the IRS scandal was a subversion of democracy on a massive scale. The most fearsome and coercive arm of the administrative state embarked on a systematic effort to suppress citizen dissent against the party in power. Thomas Friedman is famous for musing that he wishes America could be [China for a day](#). It turns out we've been China for a while.

In a CNN.com column [Donna Brazile](#) strikes the same theme with a sinister twist:

A government of, by, and for the people requires that people talk to people, that we can agree to disagree but do so in civility. If we let the politicians and those who report dictate our discourse, then our course will be dictated.

Why am I alarmed? Because two "scandals"--the IRS tax-exempt inquiries and the Department of Justice's tapping of reporters' phones--have become lynch parties. And the congressional investigation of Benghazi may become a scandal in itself.

In one breath Brazile urges everyone to be civil and respectful. In the next she labels her opponents with one of the most racially incendiary metaphors in the American lexicon. And note that she is casting government officials who abused their power as lynching *victims*.

Brazile is on to something, however, in her skepticism about "those who report." The current crisis of authority very much includes the news media, which in significant measure have abdicated their guiding principles of impartiality, objectivity and sometimes even accuracy.

Liberal media bias is an old complaint, but the Obama presidency has given it a new and dangerous form. Never has the prevailing bias of the media been so closely aligned with the ideological aims and political interests of the party in power. The American media remain free and independent, or you would not be reading this column. But to a large extent they have functioned for the past few years as if they were under state control.

The problem of media bias runs deep, and it often does not take the form of open partisanship. Here's an example, from a [Washington Post](#) story on the IRS scandal:

Nonprofit groups that do not have to pay taxes are supposed to ensure that political activity is not their primary purpose, so evidence that some of the new organizations seeking tax-exempt status were fronts for campaign organizations drew bipartisan interest. Good-government groups started pressuring the IRS to more closely scrutinize applicants. One such group, Democracy 21, wrote a series of letters to the IRS arguing that many of the groups should not receive favored tax status.

"In all of these cases, the groups were claiming (c)(4) status basically for the purpose of hiding their donors," said Democracy 21 President Fred Wertheimer.

There's a whole world of bias in that phrase "good-government groups." According to the [Inspector General's report](#), one of the red flags the IRS used to identify dissident organizations for targeting was "education of the public via advocacy/lobbying to 'make America a better place to live.'" Tea Party organizations conceive of themselves as good-government groups, just as Democracy 21 does. The Post accepts the latter characterization, but not the former, unquestioningly.



Fred Wertheimer: Nonprofit status for me, but not for thee.

The description of Democracy 21 as a "good-government group" is especially inapt in this particular story. Wertheimer's organization wrote letters lobbying the IRS to take action against political groups of whose activities it disapproved. The IRS did Wertheimer's bidding, and in so doing massively abused its power. The IRS, not Wertheimer, is culpable for the abuse of power. But it is preposterous to label Democracy 21 "a good-government group" in the course of telling how its activities encouraged an abuse of governmental power.

"Good-government group" is a misleading designation for another reason. As we [noted last week](#), Democracy 21 is itself a tax-exempt 501(c)(4) corporation. In lobbying the IRS to investigate nonprofits for engaging in political activity, Democracy 21, a nonprofit, was engaging in political activity.

That's not "good government," it's rent-seeking. A large, established corporation was seeking to use the regulatory power of the state to set up barriers to entry by smaller competitors. It is an exact parallel to the [McCain-Feingold media](#)'s insistence that corporate free speech is an outrage against democracy. In making that claim, the New York Times and others almost never mention that "media corporations" were exempt from McCain-Feingold's unconstitutional censorship.

There's been a lot of talk about Watergate lately, most of it unintentional apophysis (or "[Bimbo](#)," to use the technical term). A very funny example is the lead paragraph of a column by the Chicago Tribune's [Eric Zorn](#):

If it makes me a media lackey or a tail-wagging lap dog for President Barack Obama to hold out for, you know, actual evidence that he had anything to do with the various and glaring misbehavior, blundering and butt-covering in the governmental ranks before I begin invoking Watergate and floating the possibility of impeachment, then so be it.

Do go on, Eric. What was that you were saying about Watergate and impeachment?

As we [wrote Friday](#), this will be a scandal like Watergate if it turns out that the IRS was acting under orders from Barack Obama or Valerie Jarrett. If the White House's conduct turns out to be unimpeachable, then it is something far worse: a sign that the government itself has become a threat to the Constitution.

But it's worth pondering how Watergate helped bring about the current crisis of authority. It oversimplifies matters only slightly to say the liberal left owes its cultural authority to three events in the 1960s and 1970s. The culmination of the civil-rights movement in 1964-65 established its moral authority. The antiwar movement's success at securing defeat in Vietnam established its political authority. Watergate discredited the Republican Party. (It also made heroes of journalists *and* provided impetus for restricting the political speech of those who are not media professionals.)

The political result of all this was more polarization. The ascendant left became dominant in the Democratic Party, driving conservatives into the Republican camp, which in turn encouraged liberal Republicans to become Democrats. The cultural result--the effect on journalistic, educational, charitable and scientific institutions--was both polarization and left-wing domination.

The left, certain of its moral authority, felt entitled to rule. The grandiose Barack Obama was the personification of that attitude, if not a caricature of it. The [Portland Press Herald](#) notes a lovely example from the newly released memoir of Maine's recently retired Sen. Olympia Snowe:

In an earlier phone call, Obama had told the Republican that she could be "a modern-day Joan of Arc" by supporting his health care bill, now known as "Obamacare." When Snowe pointed out Joan of Arc had been burned at the stake, Obama reportedly replied: "Don't worry, I'll be there with a fire hose!" She still voted against the bill on the Senate floor.

Try to imagine Lyndon Johnson or Bill Clinton making that pitch.

Moral authority entails a moral hazard: the temptation to abuse political and cultural power. Today's liberal left conceives of itself as being on the side of all that is good, right and reasonable. It caricatures the right as racist, extremist, greedy, dishonest, fanatically religious, prone to violence--and dangerous because, through the Republican Party, it has maintained parity in the political arena. Of the 10 presidential elections since Watergate, each party won 5; and voters haven't entrusted the Democrats with full control of government for more than two years since the Carter era.

If ordinary politics are a battle between good and evil, then winning becomes an overriding moral imperative. The end justifies the means: Journalists shade or conceal the truth in the service of a "larger truth." Government restricts political speech in the name of promoting democracy. Administrative agencies perpetrate injustice in the name of "social justice." That's how IRS agents could think it was their patriotic duty to help fix an election for the party in power.

These wrongful actions subvert the institutions with whose stewardship the perpetrators have been entrusted. They also undermine the moral authority of those institutions' leaders. National Journal's [Ron Fournier](#) offers five suggestions for how "Obama can restore the public's trust and rescue his presidency." None of the ideas are likely to achieve those goals, but three of them seem worthy: Bring in some adult supervision at the White House, appoint a special prosecutor for the IRS, and adopt a more media-friendly policy on leak investigations. One of them--"appoint a bipartisan oversight board to oversee the implementation of Obamacare"--won't fly. Even Republicans are savvy enough not to share responsibility for that fiasco.

But the final proposal is downright ludicrous: "Reset the narrative and public expectations with a major speech on trust." It's not just that Fournier continues to imagine, against all evidence, that Obama is a dazzling orator. He fails to see that whether or not the president is personally culpable in the scandals, they all flow from his basic political character. Fournier's fantasy that Obama could "reset the narrative" with a speech suggests that he has not yet abandoned the fantasy that Obama is some sort of savior.

If Obama is no savior, neither is he the devil. He is but a man who, through a combination of ambition, talent, character and luck, became the central figure in the left's crisis of authority. That crisis had been building for decades, seems to be reaching a culmination now, and will be resolved we know not how, except that we expect the process to be convulsive.

What if we're wrong? What if the country collectively shrugs, loses interest in politics, and goes on with life? Then we really will be like China--or worse. In his Saturday column, the New York

Times's [Charles Blow](#), who at 42 is just under a decade younger than Obama, shows us where the corruption of moral authority leads.

He begins by asserting that the Obama scandals are failing to "resonate" with the public. That claim is based on a single opinion poll, so it may prove evanescent even if true. But Blow's explanation of this purported fact is chilling:

As for Tea Party groups that received extra scrutiny from the I.R.S., an Associated Press-GfK poll released last month found that fewer than a fourth of Americans say they support the group. The Tea Party may well be passé. . . .

So an unpopular movement applied for tax-exempt status under conditions made possible by an unpopular court decision, in order to influence politics with unfathomable amounts money from unnamed donors? Good luck gaining sympathy for that.

This passage exemplifies the moral and intellectual decadence of the 21st-century left. A comparison to one of Blow's Times predecessors will illustrate why. Anthony Lewis, who retired in 2001 and died this March two days shy of his 86th birthday, was insufferably smug too. But it is impossible to imagine him crowing over the persecution of an out-group *because it is unpopular*.

One common argument against such persecution is a slippery-slope appeal to self-interest: You may be next. That's the gist of the famous [Martin Niemöller](#) poem:

When the Nazis came for the communists,
I remained silent,
I was not a communist.
When they locked up the social democrats,
I remained silent,
I was not a social democrat.
When they came for the trade unionists,
I did not speak up,
because I was not a trade unionist.
When they came for me,
there was no one
left to speak out.

The analogy isn't precise. When the U.S. government came for the Tea Party, Blow's colleagues on the Times editorial board did speak out--[in support](#) of its IRS effort. But what happens when they come for the mainstream media? Then, the [editorial board](#) speaks out. But Blow remains blasé:

It is clear that the Justice Department overreached on the Associated Press scandal and that its strong-arm tactics are likely to have a chilling effect. But Americans are not big fans of mass media. A November Gallup poll found that only a fourth of Americans rate the honesty and ethical standards of journalists highly. Even bankers ranked higher.

Not only is Blow untroubled by abuses of power at the expense of an out-group he loathes, but he's only mildly bothered by what he considers an abuse of power against his own kind,

mainstream journalists. The next step after the corruption of authority, it would seem, is uncritical submission to it.

Let's again quote Barack Obama, from his [May 5 commencement address](#) at the Ohio State University:

Unfortunately, you've grown up hearing voices that incessantly warn of government as nothing more than some separate, sinister entity that's at the root of all our problems; some of these same voices also doing their best to gum up the works. They'll warn that tyranny is always lurking just around the corner. You should reject these voices. Because what they suggest is that our brave and creative and unique experiment in self-rule is somehow just a sham with which we can't be trusted.

His words were soothing, reassuring, like a lullaby. The scandals are a wake-up call.

Is democracy in peril? Is it really true that "we can't be trusted" with America's "brave and creative and unique experiment in self-rule." That all depends on what the president meant by "we."

Washington Post

[Obama administration mistakes journalism for espionage](#)

by Eugene Robinson

The Obama administration has no business rummaging through [journalists' phone records](#), perusing their e-mails and tracking their movements in an attempt to keep them from gathering news. This heavy-handed business isn't chilling, it's just plain cold.

It also may well be unconstitutional. In my reading, the First Amendment prohibition against "abridging the freedom . . . of the press" should rule out secretly obtaining two months' worth of the personal and professional phone records of Associated Press reporters and editors, including calls to and from the main AP phone number at the House press gallery in the Capitol. Yet this is what the Justice Department did.

The unwarranted snooping, which was revealed last week, would be troubling enough if it were an isolated incident. But it is part of a pattern that threatens to redefine investigative reporting as criminal behavior.

[The Post reported Monday](#) that the Justice Department secretly obtained phone and e-mail records for Fox News reporter James Rosen, and that the FBI even tracked his movements in and out of the main State Department building. Rosen's only apparent transgression? Doing what reporters are supposed to do, which is to dig out the news.

In both instances, prosecutors were trying to build criminal cases under the 1917 Espionage Act against federal employees suspected of leaking classified information. Before President Obama took office, the Espionage Act had been used to prosecute leakers a grand total of three times, including the 1971 case of Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers. [Obama's Justice Department has used the act](#) six times. And counting.

Obviously, the government has a duty to protect genuine secrets. But the problem is that every administration, without exception, tends to misuse the “top secret” stamp — sometimes from an overabundance of caution, sometimes to keep inconvenient or embarrassing information from coming to light.

That’s where journalists come in. Our job, simply, is to find out what the government doesn’t want you to know.

Sometimes reporters come across information whose disclosure would genuinely put national security at risk. When officials appeal to news organizations on such grounds, editors listen.

The case involving the Associated Press is a good example. The story at issue, published last May, involved details of a CIA operation in Yemen that foiled a terrorist plot to bomb an airliner. [AP chief executive Gary Pruitt said on “Face the Nation”](#) that the news service agreed to hold the story after administration officials warned publication would threaten security. The AP published only after officials from two government entities said the threat no longer existed, according to Pruitt.

Ironically, this was a story of success in the fight against terrorism. I have to wonder whether the administration’s real aim is to find out who leaked this bit of good news — or to discourage potential leaks of not-so-rosy news in the future.

The Fox News case is even worse. At issue is a 2009 story about how North Korea was expected to react to a U.N. Security Council resolution criticizing the rogue nation’s nuclear tests. [The Justice Department is prosecuting Stephen Jin-Woo Kim](#), then an analyst working for the State Department, for allegedly leaking to Fox News reporter Rosen a report about what North Korea was thought likely to do.

Prosecutors examined Rosen’s phone records, read his e-mails and, using the electronic record left by his security badge, even tracked when he entered and left the State Department building. How did officials justify such snooping? [By asserting in an FBI affidavit](#), according to The Post, that Rosen broke the law “at the very least, either as an aider, abettor and/or co-conspirator.”

In other words, since there is no law that makes publishing this classified information illegal, the Justice Department claims that obtaining the information was a violation of the Espionage Act.

Rosen has not been charged. Every investigative reporter, however, has been put on notice.

If this had been the view of prior administrations, surely Bob Woodward would be a lifer in some federal prison. The cell next door might be occupied by my Post colleague Dana Priest, who disclosed the [CIA’s network of secret prisons](#). Or by the New York Times’ [James Risen and Eric Lichtblau](#), who revealed the National Security Agency’s eavesdropping program.

[A federal “shield” law protecting reporters](#) from having to divulge their sources means nothing if it includes an exception for cases involving national security, as Obama favors. The president needs to understand that behavior commonly known as “whistleblowing” and “journalism” must not be construed as espionage.

Huffington Post

White House Response To IRS Scandal Making The Situation Worse

by Howard Fineman

So far, voters [don't seem to be abandoning](#) President Barack Obama [over controversies gripping](#) the Beltway world. But White House aides are tempting fate with their reluctant, piecemeal and contradictory disclosures of what they knew and when they knew it, especially about a report on the Internal Revenue Service's 18-month effort to target tea party and other conservative groups for special scrutiny.

The aides either have forgotten or are unable to implement the basic lesson of scandal control in Washington: Get the full story out -- all of it -- as fast as you can before your critics accuse you of a cover-up or worse.

It's been only a week since the president told the world that [he had learned about the "outrageous" actions](#) of the IRS' Cincinnati office from "news reports" on May 10. We now know that those reports stemmed from a disclosure the administration had planned and that, in fact, "senior officials" in the White House knew the essence of a damning inspector general's report on the matter as early as April 24.

From the start, the White House's response on this potentially explosive matter has been grudging at best and, in retrospect, ignorant or arrogant or both.

Last Tuesday, I asked White House press secretary Jay Carney about a passing reference he had made the day before in his briefing: that the White House Counsel's Office had been informed about the impending report "several weeks ago."

How did that square, I wanted to know, with the president's own statement that he hadn't learned about the matter until May 10? And what did the counsel's office learn in April? Weren't those explosive matters worth being passed on to higher-ups?

"What you are quoting is the president's description of his reaction to news reports," Carney answered in an email, "not the notification of the WHCO [White House Counsel's Office]. As the president said, he first learned about the situation from news reports. So did I.

"Previously, in the week of April 22, the WHCO was notified, as is common, about the fact that an IG was reviewing actions of IRS personnel, and that the IG report would soon be completed and made public. The content of that notification was very limited."

In a later response, Carney told me, "WHCO was not told what the IG's findings would be."

That was last Tuesday. And now we know [from Carney himself on Monday](#) that the White House counsel, Kathryn Ruemmler, not only knew the gist of the damning report, but informed top staff at the White House about it -- though apparently not Carney, who was put in the position, apparently through no fault of his own, of telling the wrong story to the press corps.

Carney wasn't the only one peddling the wrong story -- one that easily and instantly could have been corrected by Ruemmler herself or, perhaps, others in the White House Counsel's Office who might have been working on the matter of the IG report.

Instead, another top White House aide gave me the same song and dance last week after Carney did.

"Since we deal with a bunch of IG reports all the time," this top aide told me, "I wouldn't be so skeptical about a notification involving a general subject matter and limited information. There are hundreds of IG audits/investigations going on every day."

He went on to say that the IG report wasn't final when the counsel's office first heard about it, so the conclusions weren't final and, therefore, there was no reason to inform White House higher-ups.

But we now know that senior staffers were told.

We still don't know the details of how the special scrutiny of conservative groups began in 2010, who approved it, or who first learned about it higher up at the IRS and the Treasury Department. The White House says that it knew *nothing* about the matter until the counsel received a heads up about the pending IG report.

And yet tea party and other conservative groups had been complaining about the IRS scrutiny since 2010, and IRS officials had publicly reassured members of Congress that there was nothing unusual or unwarranted going on.

With two winning presidential campaigns built on successful grassroots fundraising, with a former White House counsel (in 2010-11) who is one of the Democrats' leading experts on campaign law (Bob Bauer), with former top campaign officials having been ensconced as staffers in the White House (David Axelrod, who left for the reelection campaign in early 2011, and Dan Pfeiffer among others), it's hard to imagine that the Obama inner circle was oblivious to the issue of what the IRS was doing in Cincinnati.

That may well be true. Maybe they didn't care one whit what the IG was going to say. But they sure haven't been behaving that way in the last week.

Right Turn

[Benghazi turns out to be a big deal, and not for just Republicans](#)

By Jennifer Rubin



President Obama speaks during a press conference

The spin that the American people aren't interested in Benghazi or that it's only Republicans who think something is fishy isn't faring too well in a plethora of other polls.

The GOP figures on all these are off the charts (vs. the administration). But independents are much more like GOP voters than Dems. In some cases, they view the president more harshly.

The newest [Post/ABC poll finds](#): "Last year's deadly attack on a diplomatic outpost in Benghazi, Libya, is shaping up as a real political problem for President Obama, with concern extending well beyond the conservative base. More than half of Americans say his administration is trying to cover up the facts of the attack." Asked if the White House is engaged in a cover-up, 56 percent of Republicans and 60 percent of independents say yes.

[From the latest Fox News poll](#) (figures for independents are in parenthesis): 75 percent (77 percent of independents) are following closely or somewhat closely the scandal; voters' approval of President Obama's handling trails disapproval 32 to 53 percent (29 to 54 percent for independents); 60 percent (same for independents) think there was a cover-up; 62 percent (60 percent of independents) think the president could have done more to help Americans; and by a 50-to-37 percent margin (54-to-28 percent for independents), they think the misstatements were political, not to protect national security.

Earlier this month, [Huffington Post](#) reported that its poll showed "that 42 percent of Americans said they disapprove of the way it has been handled, while 27 percent said they approve." Independents disapproved by a 47-to-19 percent margin.

[CNN shows](#) voters disapprove of Obama's handling of the Benghazi scandal by a 53-to-42 percent margin. Among independents, 58 percent disapprove. CNN is an outlier, however, on whether the administration misled the public intentionally, finding only 44 percent (and 44 percent of independents) think it did. But there, too, 84 percent of all voters and 80 percent of independents think it is important or very important to get to the bottom of it. Fifty-nine percent of all voters and 58 percent of independents think the attack could have been prevented. Only 37 percent of all voters and 37 percent of independents think the GOP is overplaying its hand.

More troublesome for the left in all these polls is the growing distrust of government, no doubt a result of the cumulative impact of Benghazi, the Internal Revenue Service and the media-spying scandals. If you are a Democrat on the ballot in 2014, you might think hard about running interference for the White House. The public is fed up, and they'll have only Ds to take it out on in the midterms.

Give the public some credit. With most of the media ignoring Benghazi until recently and non-stop spin from the administration and its liberal enablers disparaging those seeking answers, the voters have figured out that it really does matter what happened and if our leaders lied to them.

Right Turn

The press vs. the White House

by Jennifer Rubin

The Obama administration has a particularly ineffective and ham-handed approach to the media. It has launched an unprecedented attack on journalists, going so far as to label [James Rosen's ordinary newsgathering as criminal](#). It sought from its first days in office to delegitimize Fox News and limit its press access. It has evaded, delivered half-truths (and smaller fractions) and tried to frustrate mainstream reporters. But as the White House is falling down around its ears, the administration calls in lefty journalists for a private meeting. This is the distillation of "you're either with us or against us."

The strategy is not going so well. Mainstream reporters are [lashing out](#) at [Jay Carney](#) in the briefing room, while the reporting is generally hard-hitting on the full range of White House scandals. And a chunk of left-of-center pundits is scathing. Dan Pfeiffer's outing on Sunday was generally panned and [earned the White House another four Pinocchios](#).

[Ryan Lizza](#) has added to the reporting on the Rosen case, explaining:

Ronald C. Machen, Jr., the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, who is prosecuting the case, has seized records associated with two phone numbers at the White House, at least five numbers associated with Fox News, and one that has the same area code and exchange as Rosen's personal-cell-phone number (the last four numbers are redacted).

In all, Ronald C. Machen, Jr., the U.S. Attorney for the District of Columbia, has seized records associated with over thirty different phone numbers.

Fox, unsurprisingly, [has vowed to stand behind Rosen](#). ("We are outraged to learn [Monday] that James Rosen was named a criminal co-conspirator for simply doing his job as a reporter. In fact, it is downright chilling. We will unequivocally defend his right to operate as a member of what up until now has always been a free press.") Fox is anything but marginalized.

Meanwhile, the [White House Correspondents' Association](#) has [belatedly entered the fray](#). Referencing Carney's statement at a briefing that "if you're asking me whether the president believes that journalists should be prosecuted for doing their jobs, the answer is no," the group declared:

Indeed, reporters should never be threatened with prosecution for the simple act of doing their jobs. The problem is that in two recent cases, one involving Fox News' James Rosen and the other focused on the Associated Press, serious questions have been raised about whether our government has gotten far too aggressive in its monitoring of reporters' movements, phone records, and even personal email.

We do not know all of the facts in these cases, so we will just say this in general: Our country was founded on the principle of freedom of the press and nothing is more sacred to our profession. So we stand in strong solidarity with our colleagues who have been scrutinized. And in terms of the administration, ultimately what will matter more in all of these cases is action not words.

Carney's statement is typical of the weasel words we've come to expect in this administration. Is Obama the president who can halt criminalization of the media or a distant observer reflecting on events beyond his control?

If Obama actually means what Carney says, he should order the documents from the fishing expedition be returned, instruct the DOJ not to pursue such secret dragnets in the future and shift from saying he has "no apologies" to offering one.

In a real sense, then, the White House has gotten its way. The media is now divided between sycophantic apologists and everyone else. There are fewer of the former, however, by the day, and those who remain have, by close identification to the panic-stricken administration, lost a great deal of influence.

From press adoration in 2008 to open warfare in 2013. It's quite a transformation.







