

Under The Radar

While the media landscape is preoccupied by COVID-19, politics and business grinds on. 'Under the Radar' provides a concise overview and thoughtful analysis of critical stories currently being overlooked.



Trump dumps another watchdog

What happened?

U.S. State Department Inspector General Steve Linick was sacked by President Donald Trump on Friday evening, with the U.S. President saying he had lost confidence in his appointee. Inspectors General are appointed to oversee the function of U.S. departments or agencies, and are tasked with identifying any fraud, waste, abuse, or mismanagement within the executive department. In the wake of Linick's sacking CNN reported that Linick had opened an investigation into Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, specifically whether Pompeo had used a political staffer to improperly run personal errands for himself and his wife.

Linick's abrupt dismissal was condemned on both sides of the aisle, with Republicans Chuck Grassley and Mitt Romney joining Democrats in opposing the removal of a critical layer of oversight, with Romney calling Linick's firing a "threat to accountable democracy". For his part, Grassley said the President did not provide a good enough reason for sacking his official, saying that general concerns over performance were not enough to justify a dismissal.

What does it mean?

Those hoping the mercurial U.S. President would be chastened by his brush with impeachment - itself triggered by Trump suddenly sacking someone

investigating him and his associates (i.e. FBI head James Comey) - have been handed a slap in the face with the dumping of yet another watchdog.

And while Linick's rumoured investigation into Pompeo might feel like small-ball, it's the broader trend that worries. Linick follows intelligence community watchdog Michael Atkinson and Defense Department inspector general Glenn Fine out the door in recent weeks. Put together, the dismissals suggest an administration that prefers the smoky corners of secrecy to sunshine and its disinfectant.

More worryingly, the punting of Linick suggests the White House is placing a greater priority on settling scores (Linick was tangentially involved in the impeachment process) than it is dealing with the current pandemic and its ravaging impact on Americans (now over 90,000 dead) and the economy. If only Trump could grip the virus in the same way he chokes his critics.

Had he not been busy tracking down Pompeo's expenses, Linick might have turned his attention to other worrying signs emanating from Pompeo and his office, like the Secretary of State's repeated suggestion - at odds with the government's intelligence - that the coronavirus was made in a Wuhan lab.

Given its track record, the Trump administration requires more oversight than any other administration in U.S. history. Put differently, when the cat's away the mice will play, and the Trump presidency is full of rats.

Hua-wave goodbye

What happened?

Chinese tech giant Huawei has responded to Friday's announcement that the Trump administration is to tighten export controls by claiming the proposed sanctions would 'threaten to undermine the entire [telecoms] industry worldwide.' Huawei rotating chairman Guo Ping adopted a despondent tone when admitting that his company's business will be significantly affected and with it the networks of 170 countries across the globe.

China's commerce ministry was slightly more bullish, as it promised to take 'all necessary measures' in response to US restrictions.

What does it mean?

Trump's latest move is another step in the great 'decoupling' from China – as the United States unravels forty years of trade and supply chains.

It also poses significant challenges to Huawei, whose revenues are already down by \$12bn due to earlier US restrictions. And while Samsung has been touted as a potential chip supplier, this will increase pressure on Beijing to improve domestic supply chains and produce the type of technology that has long-been sourced from Silicon Valley.

For the rest of the world, and much to the glee of conspiracists, it's likely to delay

the rollout of 5G, as Huawei remains the sole entity with the technology and resources to carry projects at such a scale. And while Boris Johnson has viewed 5G as an essential component in his "levelling up" agenda – this could put an end to an internal party row over security concerns and speed up a trade deal with the US.

And the situation is unlikely to change regardless of the Presidential Election in November. Joe Biden has avoided taking a stance on China, while the likes of Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders and Amy Kloubacher have all supported tariffs in the past. Even Obama have sown some discord. While his administration hardly cracked down on China, the recent Oscar-winning documentary that he helped produce, 'American Factory', subtly conveyed the conflicting industrial mores of China and America.

In a post-COVID world, nothing can be taken off the table. Already, hawkish lawmakers are considering the logistics of forcing all US companies to pull supply chains out of China, by helping to fund the reshoring process. Kanye West, for one, is ahead of the game – planning as he is to repatriate Yeezy manufacturing to Wyoming.

But even with Federal funding, none of this would come cheap. And with all the added labour costs, one must question whether such a plan is in any way feasible.

Protecting Privacy

What happened?

An appeal lodged by Bloomberg in the Court of Appeal has been rejected. The organization had been seeking to overturn the successful case brought against them by an American businessman, who has retained his right to anonymity. The man had been awarded £25,000 in damages after Bloomberg had publishing details of the ongoing criminal investigation into him, which had been taken from a leaked confidential letter. The decision has drawn criticism from Bloomberg and the Society of Editors.

What does it mean?

The court has effectively confirmed the precedent that a person under investigation has a right to privacy. While this right has been a hot topic in recent times, this is fairly new precedent in the UK. A ruling in 1990 that there was no remedy in law for a breach of privacy sparked a newspaper free-for-all - a period in which there seemed to be no legal limit to what journalists could do to get a scoop.

But the right to “respect for private and family life” enshrined by the Human Rights Act in 1998 made it possible to sue for breach of privacy, and successful rulings against the media have since set this new precedent, firmly ending the free-for-all. The most notable example was Sir Cliff Richard’s case against the BBC, which showed that a person has a right to privacy in an investigation until they are charged. This was referenced by the judge in the Bloomberg trial.

“There is now effectively a starting gun for reporting on investigations”

The ruling has major implications for the media, specifically when reporting on criminal investigations. There is now effectively a starting gun for reporting on investigations: the suspect must be charged before they can be named. The Society of Editors has rightfully warned that the right to anonymity will merely “serve to help the rich and powerful evade scrutiny”. Nevertheless, with journalists now on a tighter leash, expect the media to tread extra carefully when reporting on those under investigation.

What Trafalgar Is Reading

Is Ronan Farrow Too Good to Be True?

[The New York Times](#)

“Some aspects of his work made me wonder if Mr. Farrow didn’t, at times, fly a little too close to the sun”

- Ben Smith’s critique of Ronan Farrow, and an examination of resistance journalism.

Money laundering on the high street

[POLITICO](#)

“As bankers developed detailed new processes to verify the source of funds, money launderers and criminals turned elsewhere to deposit and move their profits”

- Matei Rosca on the loopholes in Britain’s cash transfer system which have fueled a surge in crime and drug trade.

But if you must read about Coronavirus

The UK’s Coronavirus Debt Situation Explained In A Way
That Won’t Make Your Head Hurt

[Huffington Post](#)

“The dark cloud of money owed to others has hung over most of us at one time or another, and getting out from under its shadow normally involves discipline, graft and a depressing lack of fun stuff. But what about when that dark cloud is hanging over a government?”

- Chris York on the UK debt burden.



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