The former FBI Deputy Director comes out swinging in 'The Threat'

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By Glenn Altschuler

There is no love lost between Donald Trump and Andrew McCabe, the former deputy director (and, briefly, acting director) of the FBI.

During his campaign for president, Mr. Trump claimed that Mr. McCabe, who was in charge of investigating whether Hillary Clinton’s use of a private email server compromised classified information and national security, had a conflict of interest. In exchange for a promise not to indict her, Mr. Trump maintained, Mrs. Clinton had directed Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe to transfer $700,000 to the campaign coffers of Mr. McCabe’s wife, who was running for the Virginia state senate.

Mr. Trump continued his tweets against Andrew McCabe from the White House. Not surprisingly, Mr. McCabe believes the president is responsible for a finding by the inspector general that he “lacked candor on four separate occasions.” And for a decision by the attorney general to fire him — 26 hours before his scheduled retirement.

In “The Threat: How the FBI Protects America in the Age of Terror and Trump,” Mr. McCabe fires back. He devotes most of his book to a review of his career at the FBI, highlighting his role in combating the operations of Russian organized crime on American soil; investigating the Boston Marathon bombing; terrorist threats on New York City subways; the attack on the U.S. diplomatic compound in Benghazi, Libya; Mrs. Clinton’s email server; Russian interference in the 2016 elections and possible collusion with the Trump campaign.

Greater public knowledge of FBI activities, accomplishments and the constitutional constraints under which law enforcement agents operate is urgently necessary, Mr. McCabe emphasizes. By identifying the FBI and the CIA with the “Deep State,” declaring that their leaders are corrupt, incompetent and partisan, and taking the word of Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-Un over experts he
has appointed, Mr. Trump, Mr. McCabe asserts, is doing lasting damage to the intelligence-gathering services of the United States.

“The Threat” is filled with examples, some familiar, some new, of Mr. Trump’s breaches of propriety and historical norms, lies, mean-spirited behavior and, most important, his interference with investigations, indictments and prosecutions by the Justice Department and Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

The president was upset, Mr. McCabe reveals, that James Comey was allowed to fly home from Los Angeles after he was fired as FBI director. He demanded that Mr. Comey be forbidden from entering the FBI building to clear out his office.

According to Mr. McCabe, Mr. Trump made the self-evidently unsubstantiated claim that “at least 80 percent” of FBI personnel had voted for him. He stated as well that “so many FBI people” had contacted him to say they were glad Mr. Comey was gone. Such contact, Mr. McCabe points out, would have violated White House policy.

And, Mr. McCabe indicates, the president, who demands loyalty to him, asked, “Who did you vote for?”

Some readers, no doubt, will dismiss “The Threat” as an exercise in score settling. After all, it is obvious that Mr. McCabe is not a disinterested observer. Attorney General Jeff Sessions and Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who fired Mr. McCabe, it is worth noting, are skewered in this book as well.

That said, “The Threat” should be judged by the credibility (and, where possible, corroboration) of the analysis.

And Mr. McCabe concludes with concerns (shared by many) that, in my judgment, should command the attention of readers across the political and ideological spectrum.

Donald Trump did not invent partisanship and polarization. But our country does seem more divided than it’s been for more than a century. And Mr. McCabe provides evidence to support his assertion that the president is “actively pushing” an agenda that encourages his supporters to identify themselves as “the real Americans,” stigmatize others and seek to lock them up, and accept as “facts” only information that is presented by their media outlets.

Mr. McCabe “would love to imagine a future in which we have righted the ship.” But other than endorsing traditional values — obedience to the Constitution, fairness, compassion, individual and institutional integrity, accountability, public service and diversity — he comes up empty. Perhaps we
cannot begin until and unless we agree that the threat is real.

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