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Trump: Dumping More Prosecutors?

Ralph Nader
June 15, 2017

The turmoil inside the Trump White House is much more intense than the media is reporting. Palaces of intrigue, under perceived siege by political and law enforcement adversaries, tend to boil inward before they burst outward.

One of the most perilous decisions for Trump is how far will he go in firing prosecutors looking into his murky dealings past and present. Already he has fired former FBI Director, James Comey, who just testified before the Senate flanked by several of his loyal FBI agents in the front seats of the hearing room.

Earlier, after then President-Elect Trump assured the influential US attorney in New York City, Preet Bharara, that he could keep his job, President Trump abruptly fired him in March. It seems Mr. Trump got wind of an investigation pertaining to various ill-defined, at least publicly, inquiries, tried to contact him to find out what was going on (a clear breach of ethics) and, not receiving a response, dispatched Bharara. The US attorney had reported Trump's phone call to the chief of staff of Attorney General Jeff Sessions which probably led to his undoing.

New presidents often replace US attorneys, who are known to harbor political ambitions within the political party that appointed them to this powerful prosecutorial position. But President Trump had an additional personal motive behind his worry about Bharara.

Now Mr. Trump's White House friends are leaking a trial balloon, or shall we call it the 'nuclear option.' Can you imagine that President Trump even is considering firing Robert S. Mueller III, who is the special counsel chosen by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein to lead the investigation of possible connections between Trump's electoral campaign and Russian operatives.

Mueller, a highly respected former director of the FBI, is starting to hire staff for this important inquiry – one paralleled by similar probes under the Republican controlled Senate and House Intelligence Committees.

One can discern this possibility is more than a slip of the tongue by someone eager for publicity. Already, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, often a mouthpiece for Trump's 'thinking,' has tweeted that "Republicans are delusional if they think the special counsel is going to be fair," even after praising Mueller's integrity a few weeks earlier. The signal to fire Mueller is being trumpeted by conservative talk show hosts such as Rush Limbaugh, Mark Levin and other lucrative right wing beneficiaries of our free and public airwaves.

While this latest drama of Trump's panic unfolds, there is speculation within their ranks that Trump may fire dozens of inspectors general who investigate waste, fraud and abuse by federal agencies to which they are attached. This would be unprecedented. Inspectors General (IGs) are non-partisan, independent civil servants with traditional bi-partisan support. They return \$14 to the taxpayer for every \$1.00 they spend on their investigations.

Trump looks askance on such independence and what might be found under his cabinet and agency heads. Thus far, he is not replacing open IG positions and intends to cut IG budgets. In another brazen move, the White House has insisted that Executive Branch agencies don't have to respond to Congressional inquiries. A bizarre narcissism is taking hold in the White House. Get rid of anyone who can hold you to the rule of law. Have cabinet members bow and scrape the floor with their obeisance at a White House meeting as they surrender giving their independent judgement to a firing-prone president.

Overseas, we have names for bosses of nations who expect such orchestrated ooze. What's next, statues and giant pictures of Trump looking down on his subjects around the country?

Trump would do well to study what happened when another president, Richard Nixon, hunkered down in 1973 and fired Archibald Cox, the special prosecutor appointed to investigate the Watergate scandal. Nixon's attorney general, Elliot Richardson, refused to fire Cox and resigned in protest, followed by the protest resignation of Deputy Attorney General William French Smith.

It is possible that Trump may not want to wait as long as did Nixon, who acted after he received a subpoena from Cox requesting copies of taped conversations recorded in the Oval Office?

Nixon's firing of Cox generated a public firestorm of protests with millions of telegrams and calls pouring into Congress from the American people. The momentum to impeach Nixon accelerated. He quit just before the House of Representatives was to vote. Already, so early in the unfolding of Trump's reactions, 43 percent of the people believe that Congress should begin

impeachment proceedings to remove President Trump from office, with 45 percent of them opposed (according to a Quinnipiac poll).

Firing a special counsel before he even gets underway, much less starts issuing subpoenas, would not sit well with even more Americans and increasing numbers of Republicans in Congress who would have preferred Mr. Pence by a large margin over Mr. Trump. Trump could quit in a fit of rage. Impeaching Trump in the House and convicting him in the Senate would get the Republicans a more stable, very conservative, former congressional colleague. Could Mike Pence, a recent governor of Indiana, be our next president?

Fasten your seatbelts, the wild card in the White House is sure to get wilder and seriously test our nation's rule of law.