

Trump, targeting special counsel, bashes his own Justice Department

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Over the past several days, President Donald Trump has escalated his public attacks on Attorney General Jeff Sessions and other top Justice Department officials in what is widely seen as a prelude to an attempt to curtail or shut down the Russia probe of Special Counsel Robert Mueller.

The bizarre and unprecedented spectacle of a president publicly humiliating his hand-picked top law enforcement official is the latest expression of an intensifying political conflict within the ruling class and the state that is increasingly tearing apart Trump's own administration.

The president's extraordinary actions are at once a defensive response to the offensive against his presidency being conducted by the intelligence agencies in league with the Democratic Party and major sections of the establishment media, and an attempt to assert quasi-dictatorial powers. They are increasingly sowing divisions within the Republican Party and assuming the dimensions of a full-blown constitutional crisis.

Trump's bashing of Sessions, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein and acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe follows the sudden resignation last Friday of his press secretary Sean Spicer in protest against the appointment of Trump crony and fellow Wall Street speculator Anthony Scaramucci as director of White House communications.

Over the weekend, former intelligence chiefs John Brennan (CIA) and James Clapper (director of national intelligence) denounced Trump as a patsy of Russian President Vladimir Putin and openly questioned his loyalty to the United States at a national security forum in Aspen, Colorado.

And beginning with an interview last week with the *New York Times*, in which Trump denounced Sessions for recusing himself from the Justice Department investigation of alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible collusion by the Trump campaign, the president has attacked his attorney general virtually every day.

On Wednesday morning, Trump tweeted: "Why didn't AG Sessions replace Acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe, a [fired FBI Director James] Comey friend who was in

charge of Clinton investigation but got big dollars (\$700,000) for his wife's political run from Hillary Clinton and her representatives? Drain the Swamp!" (Trump was referring to the fact that McCabe's wife, Jill, ran unsuccessfully for a Virginia State Senate seat in 2015 and received campaign money from an organization headed by Terry McAuliffe, current governor of Virginia and a close associate of Bill and Hillary Clinton.)

At a press briefing later on Wednesday, White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders reiterated that Trump was "disappointed" in Sessions and acknowledged that the two have not spoken in recent days. She would not rule out Trump firing the attorney general. For his part, Sessions has let it be known that he does not intend to resign.

On Tuesday, at a joint White House press conference with Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri, Trump said, in response to a reporter's question: "I'm disappointed in the attorney general... If he was going to recuse himself, he should have told me prior to taking office, and I would have, quite simply, picked somebody else."

He went on to say that he wanted Sessions "to be much tougher on leaks in the intelligence agencies that are leaking like they never have before." Asked if he planned to fire Sessions, Trump replied, "We will see what happens... Time will tell."

Earlier in the day, Trump tweeted a complaint about Sessions' failure to investigate charges that the Clinton campaign colluded with the rabidly anti-Russian Ukraine government to publish information linking then-Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort to the ousted pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich. He also attacked the attorney general for not criminally investigating Clinton's use of a private email server while she was secretary of state in the Obama administration.

"Attorney General Jeff Sessions has taken a VERY weak position on Hillary Clinton crimes (where are E-mails & DNC server) & Intel leakers!" he wrote.

These developments take place in the context of Special Counsel Mueller's expansion of his Russia probe to include

financial dealings by Trump and his family members, to which Trump has responded by accusing Mueller of exceeding his mandate and charging that he and his investigators have conflicts of interest.

Democratic Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer took to the floor of the Senate on Tuesday to warn of the political consequences of a removal of Sessions and firing of Mueller. “Many Americans must be wondering,” he said, “if the president is trying to pry open the office of attorney general to appoint someone during the August recess who will fire special counsel Mueller and shut down the Russia investigation.” Such an action, he warned, would provoke a “constitutional crisis.”

Trump’s attacks on Sessions, a long-time senator from Alabama and extreme right-winger, have prompted protests from within the Republican Party. The Republican lawmakers who have spoken out in support of Sessions include Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell; senators Lindsey Graham, Richard Shelby and Orrin Hatch; House Deputy Majority Whip Tom Cole; and far-right members of the House such as Steve King of Iowa and the leader of the ultra-conservative House Freedom Caucus, Mark Meadows of North Carolina.

Both the nominally “liberal” *Washington Post* and the right-wing Republican *Wall Street Journal* ran editorials on Wednesday attacking Trump for his campaign against Sessions, singling out his revival of demands that his campaign rival Clinton be criminally prosecuted and his implied threat to fire Mueller.

Some far-right media outlets and pundits including Breitbart, Rush Limbaugh and Tucker Carlson have rebuked Trump for his attacks on Sessions, arguing that they threaten to undermine the attorney general’s anti-immigrant vendetta and law-and-order campaign in support of police repression.

There are concerns in sections of the political establishment and ruling elite that Trump is proceeding too precipitously and nakedly in dispensing with traditional bourgeois democratic forms and moving toward a presidential dictatorship, under conditions of seething popular anger and alienation from the entire political system and growing anti-capitalist sentiment in the working class. There are also fears that the billionaire oligarch is subordinating the strategic interests of US imperialism to his own business interests.

But the attempt of Democratic politicians and the “liberal” media to present Sessions as some kind of bastion of “the rule of law” and “basic American values,” in the words of the *Washington Post*, only underscores the anti-democratic and reactionary character of their opposition to Trump.

Sessions is among the most bitter enemies of the democratic rights of the working class. Thirty years ago, the

Senate Judiciary Committee rejected his nomination by President Ronald Reagan to a US district court judgeship because of his record as US attorney in Alabama in prosecuting civil rights lawyers and activists who sought to help African Americans register to vote.

He has placed himself at the forefront of the Trump administration’s war against immigrants. Just this Tuesday, his Justice Department announced new measures to step up its attack on so-called “sanctuary cities,” i.e., cities and other jurisdictions that refuse to allow their police to function as auxiliaries in the Homeland Security Department’s campaign of mass arrests and deportations of undocumented workers. Such localities will be denied key federal grants in the next fiscal year.

On the same day, the almost unanimous bipartisan vote (419-3) by the House of Representatives for a bill that places new sanctions on Russia, Iran and North Korea, and limits the Trump administration’s ability to weaken or remove them, underscored the reactionary, warmongering foreign policy agenda at the heart of the CIA-Democratic Party campaign against Trump. This campaign is not about Trump’s attacks on health care, immigrants or democratic rights. Nor is it really about the (totally unsubstantiated) allegations of Russian hacking and interference in the 2016 election.

Rather, it is about differences over US imperialist foreign policy. The anti-Trump faction of the ruling class is waging a no-holds-barred political battle to prevent any shift away from the aggressive and militaristic policy toward Russia initiated by the Obama administration. It sees Russia as an obstacle that must be removed, especially in the Middle East, where Moscow has frustrated Washington’s war for regime-change in Syria, and Eastern Europe, where it is contesting US domination of Ukraine and the Soviet-era Warsaw Pact nations.



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