

# FBI raids home, office of Trump's personal attorney

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10 April 2018

The political conflict within the US ruling elite escalated to new levels Monday, with FBI agents in Manhattan raiding the home and office of Michael Cohen, the personal attorney of President Donald Trump, and the president denouncing his own attorney general, Jeff Sessions, as well as Special Counsel Robert Mueller, whose investigation indirectly triggered the raid.

The raid was reported by the *New York Times* Monday afternoon and quickly became the subject of non-stop coverage on the television networks. Cohen is allegedly under investigation in connection with the payment of \$130,000 in hush money to adult film actress Stormy Daniels. The payment was made during the final weeks of the 2016 election campaign to insure her silence about a ten-year-old relationship with Trump.

Both the scale of the raid and the nature of the materials seized are extraordinary. FBI agents reportedly entered Cohen's home on Park Avenue, a room he was temporarily occupying at the Loews Regency Hotel, and his office in Rockefeller Center. They took not only documents related to the payment to Daniels, but records of communications between Cohen and Trump that would normally be considered protected under attorney-client privilege.

The *Washington Post* reported that the FBI took from Cohen's office his personal computer, his phone and personal financial records. The newspaper claimed, citing "a person with knowledge of the case," that Cohen is under investigation "for possible bank fraud, wire fraud and campaign finance violations."

The campaign finance violation charge would relate to the payment to Daniels, made 12 days before the election, from what Cohen claimed were personal funds. If he was not reimbursed by Trump—and the

president claimed not to have known of the payment—the \$130,000 could be construed as a donation to the campaign, far exceeding the \$2,700 legal limit.

The FBI raids were carried out based on search warrants obtained by the office of the US Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Geoffrey S. Berman, a Trump appointee. Press reports said that special counsel Robert Mueller referred the possible charges against Cohen to the US attorney, indicating that the case was not within the scope of his own investigation into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 elections. The referral would have required approval by Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein, who supervises the Mueller investigation.

Cohen's attorney Stephen Ryan denounced the FBI raids. "The decision by the US Attorney's Office in New York to conduct their investigation using search warrants is completely inappropriate and unnecessary," he told the press. "It resulted in the unnecessary seizure of protected attorney-client communications between a lawyer and his clients." He said Cohen has already supplied thousands of documents to Congress, sat for sworn depositions, and otherwise cooperated with federal investigators.

Cohen has been a peripheral figure in the Russia investigation, named in the notorious Steele dossier, paid for by the Clinton campaign, which compiled a number of allegations about Trump's business operations in Russia. One of the most dubious claims was that Cohen had met with Russian officials in the Czech Republic to discuss a possible Trump Tower project in Moscow. Cohen has denied ever visiting the Czech Republic.

Frank Montoya, a former FBI agent who served for years under Robert Mueller when he was FBI director

(2001-2013), writing in the *New York Daily News*, said the tactic of executing a search warrant rather than a subpoena was an indication of extreme hostility to both Cohen and Trump on the part of the US attorney and the FBI. “These prosecutors and investigators don’t trust them,” he wrote, “and are playing hardball, like they would with a drug dealer or a terrorist ...”

Not only the manner, but the timing of the raids is extraordinary, coming as the Trump administration is preparing to launch a major military operation against Syria. If anything, the raids seem likely to push Trump into a more aggressive military strike, which would serve to push his legal problems off the front pages. Such action would also placate his opponents within the military-intelligence apparatus, who, backed by virtually the entire Democratic Party and some prominent Republicans, have been clamoring for a more confrontational policy towards Russia.

Trump responded to the FBI raids with a ten-minute diatribe Monday evening before reporters and television cameras who had been ushered into the White House to record the beginning of a meeting of the National Security Council to discuss military options for a US attack on Syria. He denounced the raid on his lawyer as “a disgraceful situation” and “total witch hunt.”

He added, “When I saw this, when I heard about it, that is a whole new level of unfairness.” He said the Mueller investigators were “the most biased group of people ... These people have the biggest conflicts of interest I have ever seen. Democrats all. Either Democrats or a couple of Republicans who worked for President Obama.”

When one reporter shouted a question about whether he would fire Mueller, Trump replied, “We’ll see what happens,” adding that many of his supporters were urging him to do so. “Why don’t I just fire Mueller?” he continued without answering the question, referring instead to the chain of command in the Department of Justice.

As reactionary as Trump and his administration are, there is nothing progressive or democratic about the mobilization of the intelligence and police agencies of the state against him. The campaign against Trump being spearheaded by the Democratic Party, based on concocted claims of Russian “meddling” and “fake news,” is aimed at whipping up a war hysteria against

Russia and justifying Internet censorship. The escalating political warfare in Washington is a struggle between opposed factions of the same corporate-financial elite, largely over US imperialist foreign policy issues.

Trump cannot fire Mueller directly, but he can order Rosenstein to do so and fire Rosenstein if he refuses. The latest stage of the conflict sets up the possibility of a repetition of Richard Nixon’s “Saturday Night Massacre,” when the two top officials of the Justice Department resigned rather than fire special Watergate prosecutor Archibald Cox. Nixon prevailed on the third-ranking official, Solicitor General Robert Bork, to do the dirty work.

Democratic Party leaders, who have made the Russia investigation the sole axis of their opposition to Trump, responded to Trump’s comments with a further public defense of Special Counsel Mueller. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi issued a statement Monday night denouncing Trump’s “disparagement of special counsel Mueller’s investigation” as “a grave reminder of his utter contempt for the rule of law.” She reiterated the unsupported claim that “the Russians perpetrated a strategic attack on the 2016 elections to support the Trump campaign.”

Most Democrats and some Republicans have suggested that if Trump fired Mueller, it would trigger impeachment proceedings by the House of Representatives.



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