Amid report special counsel threatened to subpoena Trump

New media salvos in Washington's political civil war

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The *Washington Post* reported Monday evening that at a tense early March meeting with lawyers for President Donald Trump, Special Counsel Robert Mueller threatened to subpoena Trump to appear before a grand jury. Mueller raised the prospect when Trump lawyers said the president had no obligation to talk with federal investigators involved in the special counsel's probe into alleged Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and possible collusion by the Trump campaign.

That revelation came amidst a series of developments escalating the anti-Trump campaign being conducted by sections of the military/intelligence apparatus, working in conjunction with the Democratic Party and aligned media outlets, who consider the fascistic billionaire too "soft" on Russia and insufficiently aggressive in expanding the US war for regime-change in Syria.

On Monday, the *New York Times* published what it claims to be a compilation of questions read to lawyers for Trump by special counsel investigators. According to the *Times*, the questions were submitted in the course of the meetings held in March.

Neither the White House nor the special counsel's office has vouched for the authenticity of the questions, but the *Times* claims they were leaked by "a person outside Mr. Trump's legal team." The publication of the questions, which point to allegations that the Trump campaign sought help from the Russian government in its campaign against Democrat Hillary Clinton and that the Trump White House sought to obstruct the Justice Department's Russia investigation, including by firing FBI Director James Comey, has become the occasion for a renewed media blitz targeting Trump.

Times story coincides with a report by The NBC News alleging that White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, a retired four-star general, has repeatedly called Trump an "idiot" in conversations with White House aides and depicted himself as a bulwark against the unleashing of a world war. While both Kelly and Trump have denied the report, attributed by NBC to four unnamed officials, similar reports last year that then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson had called Trump a "moron" were followed several months later by Tillerson's removal from office.

Finally, Republican Senator John McCain, currently under treatment for brain cancer, released on Monday excerpts from a memoir to be published later this month in which he excoriates Trump as a would-be despot and denigrates his persona of American-First toughness as a "reality show facsimile of toughness." McCain writes that Trump "has declined to distinguish the actions of our government from the crimes of despotic ones."

These latest salvos in the intensifying political civil war in Washington follow the FBI raid last month in which the telephone, computer and business records of Michael Cohen, Trump's long-time personal lawyer and self-described "fixer," were seized as part of a criminal investigation nominally independent of the special counsel probe. Any information relating to Trump's dealings with other countries as well as his manifold shady business operations, however, would be available to Mueller and could be used to bring an indictment against the president.

That escalation in the ruling class faction fight was followed by the publication of Comey's book and his tour of media outlets, in which the fired FBI head

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characterized Trump as an inveterate liar and sexual deviant and called him “morally unfit” to hold office.

Trump’s lawyers are reportedly urging him not to agree to an interview with Mueller’s team. His then-top lawyer, John Dowd, resigned his post in March shortly after the list of questions from the special counsel were compiled, reportedly because Trump was spurning his counsel not to submit to an interview.

The questions listed in the *Times* article focus on:

* Trump’s firing of his first national security adviser, retired Gen. Michael Flynn, in February of 2017, and allegations by Comey that the president urged him to terminate a Justice Department probe of Flynn’s discussions with Russian officials

* Trump’s firing of Comey in May of 2017 after Comey had announced that the FBI was investigating allegations of collusion by the Trump campaign with Russia

* Trump’s threats to fire Attorney General Jeff Sessions because Sessions recused himself from the Justice Department Russia probe, opening the way for the appointment of a special counsel

* Contacts between then-Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort and other campaign officials with Russians, including the June 16 Trump Tower meeting with a Russian lawyer attended by Donald Trump Jr. and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner as well as Manafort

* Trump’s business dealings in Russia, including the 2013 Miss Universe pageant held in Moscow

* Efforts by Trump to fire Mueller.

The list of questions strongly suggests the building of a case of obstruction of justice against Trump.

The entire narrative of Russian “meddling” in the election and Russian-inspired “fake news” is a politically motivated concoction for which no serious factual substantiation has ever been presented. The same applies to the claims of collusion between the Putin government and the Trump campaign.

The palace coup operation against Trump is being mounted by no less reactionary factions of the ruling class and the state apparatus. It is being spearheaded by the Democratic Party (and some prominent Republicans such as McCain), along with media aligned with the Democrats, particularly the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Growing sections of the ruling class are losing confidence in Trump’s ability to oversee the affairs of US imperialism internationally and deal with an increasingly explosive internal political situation. The spread of strikes by teachers in defiance of the corporatist trade unions has fueled dissatisfaction with Trump within the corporate-financial elite and the military-intelligence complex. The fact that the strikes are occurring in states that voted for Trump has increased concerns that his ability to disorient workers with pseudo-populist demagogy is rapidly eroding.

The Democratic Party, the *Times* and the *Post* have responded to the April 14 missile strikes against Syria with complaints that they did not go far enough and demands for a far wider war, potentially targeting Iranian and Russian forces in the country. These forces angrily denounced Trump after he countermanded statements by the US ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, that the US was slapping new sanctions on Russia for its support to the Syrian regime.

They have at that same time been critical of Trump’s threats to pull out of the Iran nuclear deal on tactical grounds and expressed skepticism toward his diplomatic maneuvers with North Korea.

The reactionary character of both contending factions in the ruling class is reflected in the role of White House Chief of Staff Kelly. The former Marine Corps general has been lavishly praised by the Democrats and most of the media as the “adult in the room” within the White House—a moderating and stabilizing force. According to the NBC News report, however, Kelly’s most serious clash with Trump has come over immigration policy, with the former head of the Homeland Security Department opposing a punitive bipartisan immigration deal that would, however, have protected DACA immigrants from mass deportation. Trump was inclined to accept the deal but Kelly scuttled it because it was not punitive enough.

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