

Washington's political wars escalate

FBI monitored phone calls of Trump's personal lawyer

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Multiple media reports on Thursday revealed that the Federal Bureau of Investigation monitored and logged the phone calls of President Donald Trump's personal lawyer and confidante, Michael Cohen, in the period leading up to the FBI raid on Cohen's office and residences in April.

According to NBC News, at least one of the calls that were tracked was between Cohen and Trump.

The extraordinary fact that the federal government's chief police agency, an integral part of the country's intelligence network, is monitoring telephone communications between the president and his self-described "fixer" points to the explosive level of conflict within the American ruling class and its state.

The revelation comes a month after the FBI, based on a referral from Robert Mueller, the special counsel who is investigating alleged Russian interference in the 2016 election and possible collusion by the Trump campaign, raided Cohen's office and residences as part of a criminal probe into his business dealings. FBI agents seized Cohen's financial records, computer hard drive, cell phones and taped recordings of conversations. Ostensibly, the main concern of federal prosecutors is Cohen's involvement in hush-money payoffs to two women, a porn star and a former Playboy playmate, who claim to have had sexual relations with Trump.

US prosecutors, according to news reports, have also been covertly reading Cohen's emails.

Spying on a lawyer's phone calls and Internet communications is considered highly unusual, given the principle of lawyer-client privilege. However, the *Daily Beast* quoted Ken White, a former federal prosecutor, as saying, "That sort of thing happens all the time if you're dealing with mob wiretaps."

Indeed, Trump's enemies within the ruling elite and the state apparatus know with whom they are dealing. The billionaire president is a representative of the criminal American financial oligarchy, a product of the New York

real estate, casino gambling and reality TV milieu. His election expressed the degradation of American bourgeois politics and the entire political system.

There is little doubt that the FBI and Mueller have seized more than enough evidence of wrong-doing in Trump's business dealings to bring down an indictment, either to attempt a criminal prosecution—never before carried out against a sitting president—or force Trump to resign. Alternately, an indictment could become part of an impeachment effort should the Democrats win control of the House of Representatives in the November midterm elections.

No one is more aware of the threat posed by these developments than Trump himself.

That being said, the methods being employed by Trump's factional opponents within the ruling elite are profoundly anti-democratic. The Mueller investigation itself is based on concocted and unsubstantiated allegations of Russian "meddling" in the elections and collusion by the Trump campaign in Moscow's supposed efforts to swing the election in his favor.

This narrative, which has dominated US politics for nearly two years, has been used by the Democratic Party and most of the corporate media to attempt to whip up a war hysteria against Russia and force Trump to more rapidly escalate Washington's wars in the Middle East. It is also the pretext for the expanding campaign to censor the Internet and criminalize political dissent in the name of combating foreign-inspired "fake news."

These are the methods of palace coup, without the slightest democratic or progressive content. Should Trump be removed as a result of such a campaign, the result would be to shift the political system even further to the right.

The context for the latest revelations is a sharpening of the conflict between the Trump White House and Mueller. Over the past several weeks, Trump has reshuffled the legal team handling his dealings with the special counsel to pursue a

more aggressive legal response to the investigation. Last month, Trump named former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani to head the team, following the resignation of John Dowd in March.

This week, the White House announced the resignation of Ty Cobb, who had counseled Trump to adopt a cooperative posture toward Mueller, advising that such a course would lead to a more rapid conclusion to the investigation. Not only has that not occurred, but Mueller has increased pressure on Trump to agree to an interview with his investigators.

Also this week, it was reported that in discussions with Trump's lawyers in March, Mueller threatened to subpoena Trump to appear before a grand jury if he did not voluntarily agree to an interview. On Wednesday, it was announced that Emmet Flood, a Republican who served as one of Bill Clinton's lawyers during the House of Representatives impeachment process in 1998, would replace Cobb.

Flood has been described in the press as a "wartime consigliere." His appointment is seen as increasing the possibility of a legal fight to block an interview with Mueller that could ultimately go to the US Supreme Court.

In a Wednesday night television interview with Fox News' Sean Hannity, Giuliani excoriated former FBI Director James Comey, whom Trump fired last May after Comey announced that the FBI was investigating possible Trump campaign collusion with Russia. Giuliani called him "a disgraceful liar" and said he should be indicted for leaking "confidential FBI information." He called the Mueller probe "a completely tainted investigation" and denounced the FBI raid on Cohen as a "storm trooper" operation.

He cited a list of 49 questions for Trump prepared by Trump's lawyers on the basis of an oral presentation by Mueller's investigators and called the wide-ranging queries concerning links to Russians and potential obstruction of justice, including the firing of Comey, a "perjury trap." The questions were leaked and published earlier this week by the *New York Times*. The *Times*, along with the *Washington Post*, have been in the forefront of the media witch hunt against Russia.

On the question of Trump agreeing to be interviewed by Mueller, Giuliani said, "Right now, the odds are against it."

Most of the media commentary on the interview has focused on Giuliani's statement that Trump reimbursed Cohen for the \$130,000 in hush money he paid to porn star Stormy Daniels shortly before the 2016 election. Cohen has said he paid the money from his own funds and without Trump's knowledge, and last month Trump told reporters that he had no knowledge of the payoff.

It is striking that despite the media obsession with Trump

and Russia, and the single-minded focus of the Democratic Party on this reactionary campaign, the public remains skeptical, if not hostile, to the entire matter. The Democrats have said virtually nothing about Trump's war on immigrants, including the barbaric treatment of the Central American caravan of refugees forced to camp out at the US border and the denial of their right to asylum. The Democratic Party has dropped its phony opposition to Trump's tax cut for corporations and the rich and barely noted the mounting assault on social programs, from Medicaid to food stamps to housing subsidies for the poor.

This is reflected in recent polls, which show Trump's approval rating actually increasing and the Democrats' edge in the coming midterm elections cut in half since the beginning of the year.

There is mass opposition in the working class and among young people to Trump and his chauvinist, militarist and pro-corporate policies. It is reflected in the upsurge of teachers' strikes and protests in defiance of the corporatist unions, which the unions and the Democrats are doing everything they can to isolate and suppress.

This emerging movement of the working class in the US and internationally is intensifying the warfare within the American ruling class and state. The crisis is being fueled not only by sharp differences over foreign policy—including tactical differences over Trump's threat to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal and his trade war measures—but also by a general loss of confidence in Trump's ability to manage either the global affairs of US imperialism or the tense internal social and political situation.

The independent social and political struggle of the working class is the only basis for a progressive solution to the crisis of American capitalism. The opposition of workers to Trump can find no progressive outlet within the framework of the capitalist two-party system. Both factions in the current political wars, notwithstanding their bitter differences, agree on a strategy of expanding war abroad and austerity and repression at home.



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