

Trump, state secrets and the crisis of the American state

Patrick Martin, Eric London
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With the August 8 FBI raid on Donald Trump's estate in Mar-a-Lago, the crisis of the American political system has reached an unprecedented stage. It is the most significant political action taken against Trump since he emerged as a national political figure in 2015.

Ten weeks before a national midterm election in which pro-Trump candidates are prominent on the Republican ticket, the Justice Department has determined that the interests of the Biden administration's global grand strategy—centered on the escalation of the US confrontation with Russia and China—requires action against Trump at a level that goes far beyond its timid and indecisive response to his January 6, 2021 attempt to overthrow the results of the presidential election.

The documents taken by Trump to Mar-a-Lago concerned some of the most important information in the possession of the American military-intelligence apparatus. The American ruling class has developed elaborate procedures for safeguarding such state secrets, which are enforced ruthlessly.

The *Washington Post* reported Thursday that the documents included “nuclear materials,” i.e., information about nuclear weapons, whether those of the United States, its allies, or some foreign adversary or target. This information is so sensitive that it is classified under special laws and cannot be declassified, even by a president, without adhering to rigorous requirements.

On Saturday, the *Post* reported that when Trump returned a first tranche of 15 boxes of documents to the National Archives in January, officials “realized some of the returned material was clearly classified, including highly sensitive signals intelligence—intercepted electronic communications such as emails and phone calls of foreign leaders.”

The itemized list of material seized by the FBI at Mar-a-Lago, released by a Florida court Friday, also included a folder labeled “Info re: President of France.” The secrets of Emmanuel Macron, derived from US electronic surveillance and/or high-level informants in the French government, could include everything from his personal life and financial

dealings to back-channel communications with Vladimir Putin and French covert operations in North and Central Africa.

The warrant that authorized the FBI raid, made public Friday, was authorized personally by Attorney General Merrick Garland, a man of the state with decades of experience in handling the sensitive affairs of the ruling class. He supervised the prosecution of Timothy McVeigh, Ted Kaczynski, and former Washington D.C. Mayor Marion Barry. From 1997 to 2021, Garland was a judge on the Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit, the most important federal appellate court which hears most cases involving national security. He became the court's chief judge in 2013.

Garland's warrant declared that federal prosecutors had probable cause to believe Trump may have engaged in conduct that violated the Espionage Act. Since its passage in 1917, the year of the Russian Revolution and US imperialism's entry into World War I, the American ruling class has invoked this act in matters of exceptional importance to the defense of the state. It was used in the jailing of socialist Eugene V. Debs for his opposition to World War I. It was used to execute Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in 1953. It has also been invoked against Daniel Ellsberg, Chelsea Manning, and Edward Snowden, who exposed US war crimes, and most recently to demand the extradition of WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange.

To have it invoked against the former “commander in chief” of the US military-intelligence apparatus is no small matter. It is an acknowledgment that Trump has continued to operate a state within a state under the mantra *l'état, c'est moi* (“The state, it's me”). As Trump declared at the 2016 Republican National Convention, “I alone can fix it.”

Trump is no victim of an antidemocratic conspiracy. The president serves his term as an officer of the state, and he possesses no right to make use of the state's secrets and records of its crimes for his own personal gain. It does not take a great deal of imagination to understand why Trump has kept this information: to utilize it in pursuit of his ongoing fascist political conspiracy, through blackmail and

other means.

Unlike the investigation of January 6, there are no issues involving significant democratic rights in this case. There is a distinct difference in the aggressiveness with which the Justice Department and Biden administration have moved on this issue compared to its halting, ambivalent approach to the investigation and exposure of the first attempt in the history of the US to overthrow the government and establish a dictatorship. By pursuing Trump on the basis of state secrets, the Democrats will leave all the issues raised in January 6 unanswered and covered up.

However, these events expose what the real priorities of the ruling class are. The state cannot tolerate Trump's disruption of its war effort. The Democrats' appeal is to the military and repressive state apparatus, as it has been since Trump's election. Biden's strategy has always been to appeal to military brass and to "save" his "colleagues" in the Republican Party through an alliance based on imperialist bellicosity and "bipartisanship."

The Democratic Party is hoping that the Republican Party will respond to the publication of the Mar-a-Lago search warrant and revelations about state secrets by backing away from Trump. The claims of Biden's press secretary, who stated that the president knew nothing about the raids before they took place, can only mean that behind the scenes Biden is engaged in intense negotiations with the Republicans, not to secure agreement on opposing fascism but to protect the global operation of US imperialism.

Senior Republicans have disavowed the attacks on the FBI by fascistic figures like Representative Paul Gosar and Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, who have urged measures to "defund" and even "destroy" the bureau. Speaking on Sunday television interview programs, top Republican officials toned down their attacks on the Mar-a-Lago raid, defended the FBI and suggested they needed more information from Garland about the national security issues involved.

Trump has responded by signaling that he is prepared to talk, a sign that he is nervous about a confrontation over these issues. In an interview with Fox News Monday, Trump issued a half-threat: "The country is in a very dangerous position. There is tremendous anger, like I've never seen before, over all of the scams, and this new one—years of scams and witch hunts, and now this. If there is anything we can do to help, I, and my people, would certainly be willing to do that."

The Justice Department and powerful sections of the judiciary are pressing forward with investigations and prosecutions against Trump and his immediate circle. The Mar-a-Lago raid took place on August 8. On August 10, the ex-president was hauled before a Manhattan grand jury

where he took the Fifth Amendment 440 times during a deposition for the New York state investigation into the finances of the Trump Organization. On August 11-12 came the Garland press briefing and the release of the search warrant.

On August 15, a federal judge in Georgia ruled that Senator Lindsey Graham, a diehard Trump supporter, must testify before a local grand jury investigating Trump's efforts to pressure state officials to overturn the 2020 election results. The same day, lawyers representing Trump adviser Rudy Giuliani announced that he would be required to appear in person before the Georgia grand jury.

The Biden administration and the Democratic Party have gone out of their way to avoid making a connection between the raid and the events of January 6, 2021. The Democrats have tried desperately to handle the faction fight with Trump behind the scenes, out of view of the American population, to minimize the risk of touching on any issue that would trigger popular discontent. The Democrats have always focused opposition to Trump on questions of the guardianship of imperialist foreign policy, as shown by their 2019 impeachment of Trump for temporarily halting US military aid to Ukraine.

The Biden administration today commands very little public support. It is facing electoral defeat in November which could put Trump's supporters in charge of the House of Representatives, or even the entire Congress. Its war in Ukraine is stalemated, and its anti-Russia and anti-China campaigns have aroused no significant mass support. Most importantly, it faces rising discontent within the American and international working class over the slashing of living standards by inflation and the horrific, ever-increasing death toll of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its primary aim is to forge ruling class unity to prosecute the war and crush opposition from below, with no surprises from the unpredictable Trump.

Removing Trump from the political scene will not halt the growing power of far-right tendencies within the capitalist two-party system, which is the product not of one man but of a rotten political system based on massive levels of inequality and permanent war. What is necessary is not only a political settlement with Trump, but with the entire capitalist system which produced him. This is only possible through mass action by the working class.



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