

PLAYING RIGHT INTO TRUMP'S HANDS

Carl Golden, August 11, 2022

Whether Donald Trump scooped up 15 cartons of documents and classified material and scurried off to his Mar-a-Lago compound 20 months ago is politically inconsequential.

By carrying out an unprecedented raid on his Palm Beach home in search of the purloined papers, the FBI and the Department of Justice played directly into Trump's hands, delivering what he's always craved – the center of national attention and dominating frenzied media coverage.

Trump, not law enforcement, revealed the search, seizing the upper hand in framing the narrative, casting himself in the role of victim of a vindictive Department of Justice obsessed with destroying him.

He is, in all likelihood, guilty of carting materials from the White House to his home – an offense on the scale of politically corrupt severity as the equivalent of a speeding ticket, hardly the stuff to justify FBI agents wandering through his private residence turning over dishes and table vases searching for materials they've refused to describe or discuss.

Trump supporters compared the FBI action to dictatorships whose leaders routinely prosecute and imprison political opponents, acts which do violence to nearly 250 years of American democracy

Trump critics gleefully rejoiced that the Department of Justice had finally moved against the ex-president – even though the allegations are relatively minor – while hoping it represents a breakthrough that leads to far more serious charges related to Trump's role in the Jan. 6, 2021 assault on the U. S. Capitol.

Amid demands that the Department of Justice explain its decision to execute a search warrant, Trump is clearly emboldened by his self-identified victimhood and will continue to exaggerate and embellish the raid as representative of out of control politicized Federal law enforcement.

At a time when Trump seemed to be losing his grip on the Republican Party – a majority oppose his candidacy in 2024 – the FBI raid may well reunite reluctant Republicans and Trump diehards, rebuilding a stronger consensus for his continued flirtation with seeking the nomination.

Lacking clear evidence of serious violations of Federal law, Americans find it distasteful and dangerous to use the nation's premier law enforcement agency to pursue individuals based on political differences.

They may despise Trump and be offended by his coarse rhetoric and crude performances, but they are far more deeply concerned with the country falling into a place where political beliefs become subject to a law enforcement response. The issue is larger than a single individual and defending a principle should not be construed as defending Trump.

Whatever information the FBI uncovered that led to the search warrant will be subjected to intense scrutiny to determine the search's validity and whether Trump will face criminal charges.

Even the most fervent anti-Trumpers worry that failing to bring charges or securing a conviction will irreparably harm the FBI, casting it as a political tool and send Trump's political stock soaring – even riding a wave back into the White House, in the opinion of some.

The timing of the search reveals lack of forethought and judgment by the Department of Justice, and comes at a time when the Biden administration is struggling with developing a message of competence and accomplishment to pull the country out of the economic trough into which it's been driven by inflation not experienced in 40 years.

Congress is poised to approve a \$740 billion package to cut health care costs, address climate change and raise corporate taxes – the centerpiece of the Biden agenda – and the White House staff is most likely planning a gala Rose Garden bill signing ceremony filled with cheering supporters.

The Mar-a-Lago raid drove that story off the front pages and out of the lead-in to nightly newscasts – known in the business as stepping on your own story.

A delay of a week or two to focus on what the administration believed is a political triumph would have had no impact on conducting the raid. Whatever Trump has in his possession has been at Mar-a-Lago for nearly two years; it wasn't going anywhere.

In the end, dispatching FBI agents to search the home of an ex-president may turn out to be an egregious political blunder not soon forgotten.

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