

## **The Washington Post**

### **Republicans went crazy over the Trump search. Now they look idiotic.**

**By Max Boot Columnist |**

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The more we learn about the FBI's search of Mar-a-Lago, the sillier — and more sinister — the overcaffeinated Republican defenses of former president Donald Trump look.

A genius-level spinmeister, Trump set the tone with a Monday evening statement announcing: “These are dark times for our Nation, as my beautiful home, Mar-A-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida, is currently under siege, raided, and occupied by a large group of FBI agents. Nothing like this has ever happened to a President of the United States before.”

That description allowed his followers to imagine a scene straight out of a Hollywood action picture, with agents in FBI jackets busting down the doors and holding the former president and first lady at gunpoint while they ransacked the premises. Although Trump's team had a copy of the search warrant, he gave no hint of why the FBI might have been there, claiming, “It is ... an attack by Radical Left Democrats who desperately don't want me to run for President in 2024.”

His followers — which means pretty much the whole of the Republican Party — took up the cry based on no more information than that. Fox News host Mark Levin called the search “the worst attack on this republic in modern history, period.” Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Tex.) called it “corrupt & an abuse of power.” Sen. Rick Scott (R-Fla.) compared the FBI to “the Gestapo.” Not to be outdone, former House speaker Newt Gingrich (R-Whackadoodle) said the FBI was the “American Stasi,” and compared its agents to wolves “who want to eat you.” “Today is war,” declared Steven Crowder, a podcaster with a YouTube audience of 5.6 million people. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-Ga.) tweeted “DEFUND THE FBI!” Former Trump aide Stephen K. Bannon, among many others, suggested that the FBI and the Justice Department (“essentially lawless criminal organizations”) might have planted evidence.

Only now, as Paul Harvey used to say, are we hearing the rest of the story — and what has been reported so far bears no relation to the persecution fantasies of Trump and his cult followers. On Thursday evening, The Post reported that FBI agents were searching for highly classified documents relating to nuclear weapons and signals intelligence — two of the most sensitive areas in the entire U.S. government. Months ago, Trump received a subpoena for documents, and the Justice Department was not convinced that he had complied with it.

Trump at first claimed “Nuclear weapons is a hoax, just like Russia,” even though his 2016 campaign's collusion with Russia was well-documented, and then all but admitted he had done it by alleging (falsely) that “President Barack Hussein Obama” took nuclear documents. The Wall Street Journal reported Friday that the FBI removed 11 sets of classified documents, including some marked as top secret.

The New York Times, meanwhile, reported that the search was conducted by FBI agents “intentionally not wearing the blue wind breakers emblazoned with the agency's logo usually

worn during searches.” The club was closed, and Trump was not there. He was in New York, where he would plead the Fifth Amendment against self-incrimination more than 400 times during a deposition with the New York attorney general. But according to Trump’s lawyer, Trump and his family were able to watch the entire search on Mar-a-Lago’s closed-circuit security cameras. So much for the crackpot claim that the FBI could have planted evidence!

This new information turns the Trump narrative — that he is being treated worse than anyone ever in all of U.S. history — on its head. Imagine what would have happened to a lower-level government employee who was suspected of taking highly classified documents without authorization. I very much doubt that the FBI would have dealt with such a person as gently as they dealt with Trump. Anyone else caught with top-secret documents — and suspected of obstructing justice and violating the Espionage Act — would probably be in federal custody by now. Reality Winner, a former National Security Agency contractor, was sentenced to more than five years in prison for leaking documents relating to Russian interference in the 2016 election a whole lot less sensitive than the ones Trump is suspected of taking.

The right now appears to be in disarray. The ex-president’s old story has been rendered “inoperative,” as Nixon press secretary Ron Ziegler used to say, and they need a new one.

But the damage has been done. The right’s hysterical, hyperbolic reaction has weaponized their unhinged followers. On Thursday, an armed man died in a standoff with police after trying to breach the FBI’s Cincinnati office. The gunman was evidently a prolific contributor on Trump’s Truth Social site. After the FBI search, a user with his name wrote that this was a “call to arms” and “we must respond with force.”

This should be a gut check moment for responsible Republicans — if any are left — to step back and take a deep breath before more violence erupts. But sadly, most Republicans don’t seem to care what furies they have unleashed in their devotion to the principle that their supreme leader must remain above the law.