



OPINION: TRUMP'S OPPONENTS NOT PLAYING STRICTLY BY THE BOOK - RICH LOWRY

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You might have heard that Donald Trump is going to be a dictator if he wins the presidency next year. Among other things, he's threatening to target his political opponents.

Let's stipulate that Trump is a provocateur who freaks out his opponents even when he's on relatively good behavior. And his conduct after the 2020 election was genuinely alarming and deeply wrong. He shouldn't talk about going after his political enemies, let alone actually do it if he takes power again.

But the vapors over Trump's threatening statements are rich coming from people who have targeted their enemy by any means necessary for years now. The Russian-collusion investigation, the Hunter Biden cover-up and the ongoing, politically timed legal onslaught against Donald Trump are among the most shameful and tawdry efforts to destroy a political opponent in memory.

They all have involved the abuse of power by national-security or law enforcement officials, with the connivance of a complicit press. This is Watergate-break-in-level political subterfuge, or the something drawn from fever dreams about Ronald Reagan's "October Surprise," except it has all happened in plain sight.

I'm not opposed to, or shocked by, political hardball. Count me out on all the saccharine cliches about how Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill were great friends despite some polite political differences between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. The stakes in our debate are enormous, and that debate should be litigated robustly, even harshly.

But that's different from abusing investigative processes and leveraging the presumed professionalism and moral authority of current and former national-security and law enforcement officials for a political campaign against one man.

The press coverage of Trump makes it sound as though we are starting on a fresh playing field, where everything has been strictly by the book since 2016.

You'd never know that back then, top law enforcement officials began a poorly predicted investigation into Trump-campaign officials, lied to the FISA court, connived to win appointment of a special counsel, and then, that special counsel -- puffed up by the press with "walls are closing in," "only Mueller knows" coverage -- kept his investigation going well after he knew there was nothing there.

It's unmentioned that in 2020, two weeks before Election Day, former national-security officials, some of whom were highly respected, put

their names to a letter meant to mislead about the Hunter laptop; Biden, from the debate stage, lied about that laptop and his son's business dealing; and Twitter censored the story and much of the rest of the media treated it as a non-event at best.

All of this was meant to keep the laptop's true importance under wraps through Election Day, and -- if Joe Biden and compliant Justice department officials had had their way -- until this very day. If Hunter's original sweetheart plea deal hasn't blown up upon first contact with an independent-minded judge, he would have escaped serious legal consequences.

The entire affair was a rank distortion of the political and legal process. And, oh yeah, Biden Justice Department officials and Democratic prosecutors are currently trying to put the other side's leading contender for the White House in jail. As a warm-up act, they are also attempting to kneecap his business in a trial, or "trial," in which the verdict has already been decided.

Almost all these charges are unworthy, dubious or imprudent, but that hasn't stopped Trump's pursuers, most of whom have wanted their trials to start, for some reason, in March right after the Republican nomination will probably be decided.

Trump's critics would be on firmer ground objecting to his declared campaign of vengeance if they had been willing to forebear during any of these episodes; if they had ever insisted on neutrality or fair play; if they'd been willing to look beyond the man they loathe and make judgments based on truth and professional standards.

Instead, they've lit a fuse while pretending that they're opposed to pyrotechnics, with consequences as yet unknown.

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