

Here's one thing we know for sure about Trump/Russia probe - Robert Mueller is playing for keeps

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Special counsel Robert S. Mueller III recently took several actions that showed he and his team are serious and dedicated to the investigation and prosecution of crimes connected to allegations of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

On October 30, Mueller announced grand jury indictments against three former campaign officials, including Trump's onetime campaign chairman. One former campaign official reportedly pled guilty and is cooperating with the special counsel.

As a prosecutor for the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General, I also used aggressive tactics to move complex investigations forward. Because of the grand jury process and other integrity concerns, the public usually sees just the top layer of these cases. Only surface-layer details are openly disclosed. True strategic and tactical moves are often made quietly and in secret.

Here are a few "behind the scenes" strategies that Mueller's indictments seem to point to:

- The overall investigation has very few limits. Mueller is willing to seek indictments outside the scope of the original investigation once probable cause of criminal activity is identified. He is looking back through a timeframe spanning more than ten years. And he is willing to pursue rarely used criminal statutes to secure cooperation and/or convictions. Look for a far ranging and lengthy investigation.
- Mueller and his team have the ability to dig deep and uncover complex crimes. They are capable of quickly and efficiently tracking and untangling webs of corporate entities, complex real estate transactions, and numerous banking transactions to follow potentially tainted funds. This may indicate that similar financial analysis of those with close ties to the President has already occurred.
- No conduct is safe from examination and prosecution. Mueller's indictments send a profound message to potential targets and witnesses – "You may be next." The timeframe of review and range of inquiry are broad and criminal conduct unrelated to the core investigation will not be ignored. Individuals who may have been initially reluctant to cooperate may now come forward and seek favor from Mueller in coming weeks and months.
- Witnesses scheduled for questioning by Mueller and his team should beware. Mueller is apparently gearing up for a round of interviews with White House staffers and others close to the President and his election campaign. The indictment and guilty plea for false statements by a former advisor to Trump's campaign will send a powerful message to other witnesses, subjects, and targets of the investigation.

- Don't underestimate the craftiness of Mueller. For weeks the media has reported that the special prosecutor's office is full of leaks of information. But the previously unknown indictment and guilty plea of the campaign advisor prove the investigation is fully capable of keeping witnesses and their cooperation hidden for months at a time. This could mean that others have been quietly cooperating – perhaps even those with a closer relationship to the President.

It is very difficult to predict what may happen next. The recent aggressive actions by Mueller are certainly intended to soften up potential witnesses and gain cooperation from people under investigation.

If I was representing a target or person of interest, I would advise them to lay low. They should assume that all communications could be actively monitored by Mueller and his team. I would prepare my client for contact with the prosecutors and do as much homework as possible into my client's contacts, financial dealings, and email correspondence. Witnesses and possible targets of the investigation will need the best possible legal representation to deal with the Special Counsel's office.

One thing is now crystal clear to all – Mueller is playing for keeps.

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