Barr Uses Language to His Advantage

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Language matters as does one’s rhetorical choices. In testimony on April 10 attorney general Bill Barr, after pausing and carefully deliberating, declared: “I think spying did occur.” Using the non-legal term “spying” and making such an obviously loaded and inflammatory claim without any supporting evidence is an example of how another Trump appointee is rhetorically shaping the political narrative rather than talking like the nation’s chief law enforcement officer.

Let’s be clear: a person of Barr's experience and expertise, having served as an attorney general twice, who normally speaks formally and with legal precision, would never employ such language casually and without thought. Perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised. After all, prior actions predict future behavior. Over twenty years ago New York Times columnist William Safire referred to Barr as “Cover-up-General Barr” because of his role in burying evidence of then-President George H.W. Bush’s involvement in “Iraqgate” and “Iron-Contra.”

A clear and worrisome rhetorical pattern is emerging: Trump’s appointees and supporters strategically are invoking the exact political language and arguments the President has used to counter charges against him. This is not a coincidence.

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