

Sir, Edward Luce writes that Donald Trump, as President, in theory can do what he likes; he can fire his attorney general, Jeff Sessions, and the special counsel, Robert Mueller, and would be constrained only by public opinion, which given past performance would hardly matter ("Trump, Sessions..." Comment 27 July 2017). This is not quite true. Mr Trump is constrained by the constitutional principle of "responsible government," which means that he can fire Jeff Sessions only for cause, such as corruption or gross negligence, but not because his AG's perfectly reasonable and legally mandated self-recusal angers him. This, no doubt, is the underlying reason for Trump's campaign of vilification.

Mr Trump may appoint his AG at pleasure, but the A.G. is confirmed by the Senate and presides over the system of justice which runs autonomously. He is therefore responsible to the the Constitution, or in other words, to upholding the rule of law, and not to the will of the executive, in much the same way that Britain's Crown constitutionally appoints the prime minister at pleasure who is in turn responsible to parliament.

If Mr Trump fired Sessions whimsically, the AG could challenge him before the Supreme Court and would no doubt win. If Mr Trump fired Mr Mueller, say by replacing the deputy AG in order to do the dirty work, Congress would promptly pass a special prosecutor law and appoint Mr Mueller so that he could finish his work. The Republican Senate backlash against Trump's assault on Sessions reveals that this course of action would be more than likely. The next step would be Mr Trump's impeachment and removal from office. Trump traverses a slippery slope.

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