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When Donald Trump hits a brick wall called democracy, he can't get no satisfaction

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Damn it – he thought he was king.

In discovering late Friday that as President he's one of three intermeshed branches of government, Donald Trump belittled the jurist who had pulled him up as a "so-called judge" and his ruling that iced Trump's immigration crackdown as "ridiculous".

But much to their amazement, Trump and the Bannon bunch keep running into this brick wall – it's called American democracy.

Throughout last week a succession of judges around the country nipped and tucked the controversial executive order, by which Trump halted all refugees entering the US for four months, pending a proposed new "extreme vetting" that would block entry by "radical Islamic terrorists". The ban was to be indefinite for refugees from Syria and all travel from Syria and six other Muslim-majority countries - Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen - was suspended for three months.

In putting the whole Trump order on hold, Judge James Robart, who was appointed to the bench by George W. Bush, the country's last Republican president, took the opportunity to give the new President a primer on the three branches of US government – writing that "fundamental" to the court's work was "a vigilant recognition that it is but one of three equal branches of our federal government".

And a series of leaks in the last 24 hours suggest that the Bannon boys still can't get no satisfaction – in the words of the song that the Rolling Stones demanded Trump cease playing at his campaign rallies last year.

There was a fantastic point of drama in early chaotic hours of Trump's order being implemented. When Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly decided to exempt green card holders, Bannon figured he could order Kelly to back off – but, the *Washington Post* reports, "respectfully but firmly, the retired general and longtime marine told Bannon that despite his high position in the White House and close relationship with Trump, the former Breitbart [News] chief was not in Kelly's chain of command".

What followed was equally remarkable – a 2am council of war at the White House, during which Kelly, Defence Secretary Jim Mattis and then-yet-to-be-confirmed secretary of state Rex Tillerson hammered Bannon and the rest of the White House political team for shutting them out of the secretive drafting of the migration executive order and their stubbornness in resisting sensible changes to it.

And what came out of that was remarkable too – Trump declared that until his White House team could get their act together, he'd issue no more executive orders. And he didn't until Friday.

But if the courts and the cabinet are forcing a revision in thinking at the White House, it seems that Congress is making an impact too – a draft executive order that had been circulated has been amended to delete a reference to reopening controversial "black site" prisons, foreign-located facilities in which the CIA tortured terror suspects.

Also deleted from the draft order is a bid to revive the language of a Bush jnr-era executive order on acceptable levels of torture.

Despite a Saturday morning Twitter storm, in which Trump railed against the Seattle judge's decisions, various arms of the administration acknowledged through the day that Trump's first crash-bang executive order, the one that was intended as a gesture to his hardcore followers, was on hold, that airlines had been told that approved refugees and others with visas from the seven named countries could enter the US.

Judge Robart has summoned the parties back to his court on Monday, to debate the mechanics of making his temporary suspension of the Trump order permanent – but the White House has made it clear that it intends to apply to the courts to have the order set aside.

The White House reissued the first statement in which it attacked Robart's decision – deleting the word "outrageous".

But the Trump tweets continued to express outrage and, with it, the same sort of contempt that Trump heaped last year on a judge of Mexican heritage who presided over a series of actions on Trump's dodgy university.

In quick succession, Trump wrote:

- "The opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law enforcement away from our country, is ridiculous and will be overturned!"
- "When a country is no longer able to say who can, and who cannot, come in & out, especially for reasons of safety & security – big trouble!"
- "Interesting that certain Middle-Eastern countries agree with the ban. They know if certain people are allowed in its death & destruction!"

Together they are classic Trump. Apart from his contempt for the judge, he seemingly figures that the executive branch alone is the "country" and he offers no proof of his claim that countries in the Middle East support his migration crackdown.

Amidst a sea of numbers in various reports, it seems that the Robart decision has cleared the way for tens of thousands of refugees and other visa holders from the seven countries to enter the US – but the court ruling did not address the fate of 60,000 or more whose visas had been revoked in the crackdown.

Taken by the states of Washington and Minnesota, the Seattle court action claimed that Trump's order was "separating families, harming thousands of the States' residents, damaging the States' economies, hurting State-based companies, and undermining both States' sovereign interest in remaining a welcoming place for immigrants and refugees".

The White House countered: "The President's order is intended to protect the homeland and he has the constitutional authority and responsibility to protect the American people."

But in trying to sell the order to sceptics, the administration has failed to address the order's most glaring shortcoming – in the 40 years to 2015, not a single American was killed on US soil by citizens from any of the seven countries targeted, according to research by the conservative-leaning Cato Institute.

Trump claims to be motivated by the horrific September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, but the countries of which the 19 aircraft hijackers were citizens are not on the list – most came from Saudi Arabia and the rest from the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Lebanon. Also absurdly absent are Pakistan, Turkey and Afghanistan.

In language that would infuriate the king ... sorry, that should be President, Washington state Attorney-General Bob Ferguson told reporters from the steps of the Seattle court: "We are a nation of laws. Not even the President can violate the constitution. No one is above the law, not even the President.

"This decision shuts down the executive order immediately – shuts it down. That relief is immediate – happens right now. That's the bottom line."

Perhaps the real bottom line is this – the Supreme Court is likely to make the final decision on this business. And within the logic of Trump's tweets and the US Constitution, that does represent the country being able to say who can, and who cannot, come in.