Lindsey Graham threatens troops to force Congress vote on military cuts

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Appearing before a Republican audience in New Hampshire last Sunday, Lindsey Graham, the Republican senator from South Carolina and potential presidential candidate, let slip a remark that says much about the real relations within the US state apparatus.

Asked about potential across the board cuts to military spending under sequestration, Graham replied that he was "sick to [his] stomach" about the potential cutbacks.

He continued: "And here is the first thing I would do if I were President of the United States: I wouldn't let Congress leave town until we fix this. I would literally use the military to keep them in if I had to. We're not leaving town until we restore these defense cuts. We're not leaving town until we restore the intel cuts."

Graham's statement amounted to a modest proposal for a military coup. The apparent call for armed troops to ring the Capitol building until the Congress produced the budget that the Pentagon demanded was later brushed aside as a "joke," though an audiotape of the event did not record much laughter.

An aide to the Republican senator told Bloomberg news that Graham did not mean his call for the military to besiege Congress "to be taken literally," even though "literally" is precisely the word Graham used in introducing his description of the extraordinary measures he would take as president.

The prospect of helmeted troops forcing recalcitrant US congressmen to approve a military budget at bayonet point may sound far-fetched—something more appropriate to the many oppressed countries in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East, where the CIA and the Pentagon have orchestrated just such armed seizures of power, along with the bloody repression of the working class.

But for anyone thinking that this kind of thing can't happen here, Graham's overly candid comment is only one more indication that the question of deploying he military in one form or another within the United States is not far from the minds of the political representatives of the ruling class. It takes place under conditions of both bitter conflicts within the ruling class and growing social tensions within the country as a whole.

The immediate context of Graham's remark, the prospect of cuts in the gargantuan US military budget through sequestration, has been the subject of a steadily escalating crescendo of hysteria on Capitol Hill, with the Pentagon's civilian and uniformed chiefs warning of cataclysmic consequences.

Typical was recent testimony offered by Marine Corps Gen. John Kelly, who warned: "It will be a catastrophe. It will put me out of business. We could be talking not about higher risk or severe risk, but defeat." What country would inflict such a defeat, Kelly, the head of SOUTHCOM, which directs US military operations in Latin America, did not say. Presumably Venezuela.

Senator John McCain and Congressman Mack Thornberry, the Republican chairmen, respectively, of the Senate and House Armed Services Committees, warned in a *Wall Street Journal* opinion column this week of inevitable "national security failures" resulting from sequestration, while pointing to prospects for US military action against Russia, China and Iran, in addition to the ongoing war in Iraq and Syria. They proposed that, instead of funds being cut for the US war machine, they should be taken out of "entitlements"—Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid—and that the Pentagon budget be increased to $577 billion.

The minimal cuts to the Pentagon are proposed in the context of US military spending having roughly doubled since 2001. One would never guess from the predictions of failure and defeat that Washington spends four times as much on its armed forces as its nearest rival, China, and that outstrips the world's next 14 largest military powers combined.

Underlying the hysterical opposition to any attempt to

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trim the massive US military spending is a doctrine of total war involving US military interventions around the globe, coalescing ultimately into a Third World War. This military doctrine is further solidified in the immense profit interests of arms manufacturers like Lockheed Martin, Boeing, Northrop Grumann and General Dynamics.

In his 1961 farewell address, President Dwight Eisenhower warned the American public of the “grave implications” posed to democracy by the “military industrial complex.” He cautioned that the unchecked growth of and ever-closer relations between the US military and a financially powerful arms industry had the “potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power.”

The threat that Eisenhower pointed to over half a century ago has metastasized into something that the former World War II commander could never have imagined. The military and intelligence apparatus has amassed immense power even as it has engaged in ever more criminal activities. Leading politicians, like Graham, McCain and others, openly argue that decisions on war and peace—not to mention spending levels—be left to the generals.

Meanwhile, the military has turned its attention ever more directly toward the prospect of operations within the so-called US “homeland.”

In its most recent document outlining its global strategy released last October, the US Army spelled out its need to “respond and mitigate crises in the homeland” and to prepare to provide “defense support of civil authorities.”

The unceasing growth of American militarism, together with the relentless rise in social inequality, are wholly incompatible with constitutional forms of rule and basic democratic rights.

Whether Senator Graham now wants to be “taken literally” or not, American workers should interpret his remark as a deadly serious warning.

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