

Trump summons the Senate to the White House

Andre Damon
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In a move without precedent in American history, President Donald Trump has invited the entire Senate to the White House to be briefed at a closed-door meeting on potential military action against North Korea. The event is a clear departure from traditional constitutional norms, with ominous implications.

It is not unusual for members of the executive branch, including military and intelligence officials, to brief members of Congress in closed-door sessions. But the constitutional doctrine of separation of powers between three coequal branches of government—executive, legislative and judicial—dictates that the executive present itself before the elected representatives of the people, not the other way around.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt sought a declaration of War against Japan on December 8, 1941, he delivered a speech to Congress, leading to a congressional declaration of war the same day. Today, 76 years later, it is the Senate that is coming to the White House, to be briefed by the military brass about plans to launch a war that will proceed with or without its authorization.

The session will take place Wednesday afternoon in the auditorium of the Eisenhower Office Building, adjacent to the White House, which will be temporarily transformed into a “sensitive compartmented information facility.” The senators will not be allowed to bring phones or have their staffs with them.

They will be addressed by high-level military and intelligence officials, including Defense Secretary James Mattis, a former four-star general; General Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, the former head of ExxonMobil, will also be present.

While Trump’s presence has not been announced,

the *Washington Post* wrote: “Congressional staffers suggested that the briefing’s proximity to Trump would make it easy for him to ‘drop by’ and perhaps take over the briefing.”

Trump’s summoning of the Senate to the White House is of a piece with other moves by the administration to outfit the office of the president with trappings associated with authoritarianism and dictatorial rule. At Trump’s inauguration, White House officials requested that tanks and other armored vehicles parade through Washington. During the inaugural address, a group of soldiers lined up behind the new president, in direct view of the main camera, before apparently being ordered to disperse. This extraordinary and unprecedented intrusion of the military into the swearing in of the incoming president has never been explained.

What Wednesday’s White House meeting symbolizes above all is the power of the military over the entire state apparatus. This is the outcome of more than a quarter century of unending war, accompanied by an immense growth in the power and political influence of the military. Today, decisions of the gravest consequence—including military action that could start a world war—are made by a cabal of conspirators in the ruling class and the military high command.

There is no longer even a pretense of public debate or congressional oversight and control. The so-called “deep state” operates behind the backs of the people with utter disregard for the deeply felt antiwar sentiment of the working class and youth.

Trump’s summoning of the Senate to the White House comes amidst a buildup of military tensions in the Pacific, centered on North Korea. The administration has for weeks threatened to carry out a preemptive strike against the impoverished country,

ostensibly to prevent it from building nuclear-armed missiles capable of reaching the United States. The power to make major decisions—like the dropping of the Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb on Afghanistan earlier this month—has been turned over to military officials.

There is no “peace faction” within the ruling establishment. The aggressive and belligerent foreign policy moves by the Trump administration have been welcomed by both Democrats and Republicans. The first two months of the Trump presidency were dominated by a hysterical campaign, led by the Democrats, to portray Trump as a Russian “poodle.” When Trump carried out a cruise missile attack against Syria, Russia’s ally, it was universally acclaimed, with Democrats demanding even more aggressive regime-change operations.

Not a single senator has as yet indicated opposition to the closed-door meeting at the White House, let alone announced that he or she will refuse to attend.

Unending war and extreme social inequality have fatally undermined bourgeois-democratic forms in the United States. The Trump administration, with its open contempt for democratic rights and its authoritarian methods, is the outcome of a decades-long decay of American democracy. Congress itself is staffed with wealthy and corrupt stooges of corporate interests and the military/intelligence apparatus, and that goes for both parties.

The media serves as a conduit for state propaganda. Dissent is denounced as “fake news” and “information warfare” by foreign enemies.

The notion that Congress has the responsibility to exercise a check on war powers has disappeared. Beginning with the Korean War in 1950, US presidents have carried out dozens of military interventions without a declaration of war by Congress, as stipulated in the Constitution.

The War Powers Act, passed in 1973, requiring congressional authorization for any military action lasting more than 60 days, has repeatedly been breached in practice. It was openly flouted by the Obama administration in its 2011 air war against Libya.

Today’s meeting is not an exercise in congressional oversight, but rather a summoning of political representatives of the ruling class to receive their marching orders from the military brass. It is

symptomatic of the collapse of democratic forms of rule and the accelerating drive to dictatorship.



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