

Trump's speech on Afghanistan: The military in command

Joseph Kishore
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Trump's new policy in Afghanistan, unveiled in a nationally televised address Monday evening, is a declaration of open-ended and unrestrained military violence against a country that has suffered sixteen years of unbroken American aggression.

Since the Bush administration launched the US invasion of Afghanistan in October of 2001, 175,000 people have been killed, according to conservative estimates, and millions more driven from their homes. Under Bush, Obama and now Trump, the US military has carried out countless atrocities and war crimes—from the November 2001 massacre of 800 Taliban prisoners at Mazar-i-Sharif, to the 2002 slaughter of 48 people at a wedding party in Kakarak, the murder of 42 medical personnel and patients at a Doctors Without Borders medical center in Kunduz in 2015, and the dropping of the Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb, the largest nonnuclear weapon in the US arsenal, in Nangarhar Province this past April.

This violence will be dramatically escalated, with a carte blanche commitment by Trump to provide whatever troops and resources the US military command deems necessary. Trump declared that he will give the military “the necessary tools and rules of engagement” to defeat any resistance. All restrictions on operations “that prevented the secretary of defense and commanders in the field from fully and swiftly waging battle against the enemy” will be lifted.

In other words, the carnage already inflicted on the Afghan people will pale in comparison to what is coming.

Trump's speech, however, was not simply about Afghanistan. It was, in effect, a declaration of war on the world. Trump threatened Pakistan and sided openly with India amidst mounting conflicts between the two countries and between India and China. The growing

tensions between the United States and its nominal allies in Europe were reflected in Trump's demand that NATO countries contribute more troops and resources to an expanded Afghan war.

The speech was delivered as the administration debates launching a preemptive strike against North Korea. In an ominous warning of what is being planned, Trump proclaimed that under his administration “many billions of dollars more is being spent on our military, and this includes vast amounts being spent on our nuclear arsenal and missile defense.”

Behind all the bombast, a combination of demoralization and fear pervaded Trump's speech. Everywhere the American ruling class looks it sees current or potential enemies. There is a large element of derangement in the notion that American imperialism can resolve its mounting economic, social and geopolitical crises by dropping more bombs and killing more people.

This very delusion, over the course of 25 years of unending war since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, has produced one debacle after another for the American ruling class—across the Middle East, in North Africa and beyond. This includes Afghanistan, where successive US governments have failed to establish control through bloody violence. Increasingly, American imperialism is directing its focus on larger competitors such as Russia, China and even Germany.

The ruling class is acutely aware that it confronts its greatest enemy within the United States in the form of the American working class.

Trump's speech was most significant for its assertion of what amounts to a presidential-military dictatorship. The president upheld as a principle the insistence that the American people will be told nothing about what is

being planned, how many troops will be sent or how long they will remain. All decisions will be made by the military, without even the pretense of Congressional oversight or approval. Trump delivered his speech not to the American people, but to an audience of soldiers dressed in battle fatigues and subject to military discipline.

The most remarkable passages in Trump's speech came at the beginning. He delivered a paean to the military as the essential force for controlling a divided nation. The military is an instrument of "absolutely perfect cohesion," Trump declared. "The soldier understands what we as a nation too often forget," he said. "The young men and women we send to fight our wars abroad deserve to return to a country that is not at war with itself at home."

The events in Charlottesville were the immediate context for these statements. Trump's declaration that the military "transcends every line of race, ethnicity, creed and color" largely adopted the pseudo-democratic comments of the top generals on the fascist rampage in Charlottesville. The military brass, concerned over the consequences of Trump's open sympathy for the neo-Nazis, felt obliged to distance themselves, the better to prosecute wars of aggression in behalf of the US corporate elite that are invariably presented as wars for "democracy" and "freedom."

Trump's statements have profoundly sinister implications. They portray the military as the unifier of a fractured country, a force for structure, discipline—and repression. Under conditions of mounting social and political conflicts within the United States, his speech is a declaration of the central role of the military not only in waging war abroad, but maintaining order at home.

From the beginning of the Trump administration, the military has taken direct control of much of the state apparatus, in the form of retired Gen. James Mattis as secretary of defense, active-duty Gen. H.R. McMaster as national security advisor and retired Gen. John Kelly, first as Department of Homeland Security secretary and now as White House chief of staff.

The Trump administration, however, is not the cause but a symptom of an underlying disease. Unending war and four decades of social counterrevolution have fatally eroded the foundations of democratic forms of rule in the United States. Top generals act as kingmakers. They have developed the closest ties to the

financial aristocracy and are universally praised in the media and the political establishment. Terrified of social unrest, the ruling class turns to its bodies of armed men—the military and police—backed by the intelligence agencies.

Far from opposing the influence of the military, it is to Kelly, Mattis and McMaster that Trump's critics in the Democratic Party have turned in the hope that they will stabilize the Trump administration and compel it to continue and escalate the Obama administration's policy of confrontation with Russia. Jeh Johnson, Obama's homeland security secretary, expressed the general sentiment when asked over the weekend if Mattis and Kelly should resign. "Absolutely not... We need people like John Kelly, Jim Mattis, H.R. McMaster to right the ship."

The outcome of the political warfare in Washington, culminating in the dismissal of Trump's fascist chief strategist Stephen Bannon last week, has been to strengthen the direct domination of the military and Wall Street over the Trump administration. Monday's speech was an acknowledgement on Trump's part of this shift in political forces.

In their conflict with Trump, the Democrats and their political allies have worked to bury beneath an endless series of diversionary issues—centered on a grossly distorted presentation of the United States as a country torn by irreconcilable racial divisions—the most critical issues: social inequality, poverty, war and the unprecedented growth in the power of the military-industrial-financial complex, which represents the most serious threat to the democratic and social rights of the working class.

In response to Trump's commitment to ever-greater military violence, a new antiwar movement must be built. The fight against imperialist war must be rooted in the working class, mobilized on an international basis in opposition to all the organizations and institutions of the ruling class and the capitalist system they defend.



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