US Republican senator calls Trump “dangerous to a democracy”

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US Senator Jeff Flake, Republican from Arizona, made an extraordinary speech Tuesday on the floor of the Senate denouncing President Donald Trump and declaring his behavior “dangerous to a democracy.” Flake’s speech was the latest in a series of statements from top Republicans that reveal the fracturing of the party and the escalating political crisis in the United States.

“We must never regard as ‘normal’ the regular and casual undermining of our democratic norms and ideals,” Flake said, clearly referring to Trump, whom he did not explicitly name. “We must never meekly accept the daily sundering of our country—the personal attacks, the threats against principles, freedoms and institutions.”

Flake’s speech followed another heated exchange between President Trump and Republican Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee, the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who said yesterday that Trump “is debasing our country.” Last week, Republican Senator John McCain and former President George W. Bush both gave speeches criticizing Trump’s brand of nationalist politics.

Trump has also had sharp conflicts with Mitch McConnell, the Republican Senate majority leader. McConnell praised Flake after his speech, declaring, “We have just witnessed a speech from a very fine man.”

Commenting on statements by Flake and Corker, NBC’s Nightly News program observed, “A political earthquake shakes the GOP so hard, it’s splintered.”

Trump’s critics in the Republican Party establishment speak for sections of the ruling class and the military-intelligence apparatus. Both McCain and Corker have close ties to sections of the military. Flake is a right-wing Republican who is best known for his advocacy of cuts in taxes and social programs.

The current conflict marks an escalation of divisions within the state that have developed throughout the Trump administration.

One factor in the conflict within the Republican Party is the role of Trump’s former chief strategist, Stephen Bannon, who continues to work closely with Trump. Bannon, after resuming his post as head of *Breitbart News*, is working to cultivate a far-right, fascistic movement, either by taking over the Republican Party or by breaking it apart.

Flake announced yesterday that he would not seek reelection as he faced declining poll numbers in a conflict with his main challenger, Republican Kelli Ward, who kicked off her campaign last week with Bannon at her side. Bannon said in response to Flake’s resignation, “Our movement will defeat you in primaries or force you to retire.” He added, “The days of establishment Republicans who oppose the people’s America First agenda are numbered.”

In his speech, Flake appeared to imply that he had been targeted by the Bannon wing of the Republican Party because he had criticized Trump. He said, “When we remain silent and fail to act… because of political considerations, because we might make enemies, because we might alienate the base, because we might provoke a primary challenge… then we dishonor our principles and forsake our obligations.”

Bannon is seeking to create within the United States a movement modeled on the Alternative for Germany (AfD), the UK Independence Party and the National Front in France. The election of Trump is part of an international phenomenon, in which extreme nationalist and fascistic movements have advanced under conditions of growing social tensions and the absence of any organized left-wing opposition to the policies of

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the corporate and financial elite.

The crisis within the United States is further fueled by the break with constitutional and democratic norms within the White House. In recent days, Washington has been embroiled in an escalating conflict following the deaths of four US soldiers in Niger. The military operation in Niger has been ongoing without the authorization of Congress and behind the backs of the American people.

Last week, White House Chief of Staff John Kelly, a retired Marine general, responded to criticism of Trump for his response to the deaths, including a call to the wife of one of the dead soldiers, by declaring it illegitimate. White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders responded to criticisms of Kelly's remarks by stating, “If you want to get into a debate with a four-star Marine general, I think that that’s something highly inappropriate.”

One question that arises from Flake’s speech and his references to the “danger to democracy” is: What does Flake know that he is not telling the American people?

The increasingly open break with constitutional norms cannot but generate conflicts within the ruling class. In his speech, Flake expressed the concern that Trump’s “America First” nationalism is undermining the interests of American imperialism abroad. “Now, the efficacy of American leadership around the globe has come into question.” he said. “It seems that we, the architects of this visionary rules-based world order that has brought so much freedom and prosperity, are the ones most eager to abandon it.” He added, “The implications of this abandonment are profound.”

The Trump administration does not, however, arise out of nowhere. It is the culmination of a protracted process, whose milestones include the theft of the 2000 election, the destruction of democratic rights that followed the launching of the “war on terror,” and the Obama administration’s drone assassination program. The various sides in the palace intrigues within the state are all appealing for support to the military, which is emerging ever more openly as the arbiter of American politics.

For their part, the Democrats were notably cool to Flake’s denunciation of Trump, giving only the most perfunctory of statements as of Tuesday night. “Senator Flake’s retirement is another example of the divisiveness roiling Republican primaries,” Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee spokesman David Bergstein said in a statement.

Throughout the Trump presidency, the Democrats have said little about Trump's flagrant attacks on democratic forms of rule. Rather, they have concentrated their fire on his supposed ties to Russia, with the aim of pressuring the administration to continue an anti-Russia foreign policy. The anti-Russia campaign is now developing into a justification for an attack on free speech and an effort to impose corporate-state control over the Internet.

Meanwhile, the Democrats remain hopeful that they can reach a deal to slash corporate taxes, which representatives of both parties support.

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