

In Thanksgiving teleconference, Trump appeals to military against courts, political opponents

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US President Donald Trump spent his Thanksgiving morning Thursday hosting a teleconference—from the bordello-like atmosphere of his grotesque Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida—with military officials and commanders in different parts of the world.

The call included Army Colonel Stephanie Barton of the 101st Airborne Division in Afghanistan; Marine Lieutenant Colonel Sam Howie at the al-Jaber Air Base in Kuwait; Navy Captain Pat Hannifin aboard the USS Ronald Reagan; Air Force Brigadier General David Lyons in Afghanistan; and Lieutenant Nicholas Hartmann of the US Coast Guard in Bahrain.

Trump used the opportunity to solicit direct military support against his political opponents and US court decisions unfavorable to the White House.

“You probably see over the news what’s happening on our southern border,” he told Lyons, comparing the administration’s fascistic immigration policies with the fight against “terrorists” in Afghanistan. “Large numbers of people [are trying to cross the border], and in many cases, we have no idea who they are. And in many cases, they’re not good people; they’re bad people... You’re doing it over there, we’re doing it over here.”

Trump went on to attack “bad court decisions from the Ninth Circuit”—repeating his denunciations of the American judiciary system for a Northern District of California ruling that the Department of Homeland Security acted illegally when it began refusing to accept asylum applications from immigrants crossing the US-Mexico border.

“It’s a terrible thing when judges take over your protective services; when they tell you how to protect your border,” Trump said. “It’s a disgrace.”

In an extraordinary statement in a press briefing that followed the conference, Trump denounced the fact that “some judge, sitting in some location very far away, is telling our incredible military and law enforcement what to do.” That is, the military, police and border security officials—and the White House—should not be subject to any legal restraint or judicial oversight.

At other points in the teleconference and press briefing, Trump praised the massive growth in military spending under his administration and threatened to completely close the US border with Mexico if the administration determined that Mexico had lost “control” of its side of the border.

Such statements are extraordinary—and dangerous. Trump is making a direct appeal to the military against legal and judicial decisions, which is itself illegal. While the teleconference with the military officials has been reported in the media, there has been no significant treatment of its implications.

The teleconference is the latest in a series of actions aimed at developing Trump’s own personalist relationship with military commanders and increasing the power of the military in domestic affairs.

This began with Trump’s inauguration speech in 2017, which involved a sinister incident during which ten officers from various military services lined up behind Trump and remained long enough for images of the president flanked by the military to be broadcast throughout the world. The aim of the action, which was hardly commented on in the media, was to present the incoming administration as a quasi-militarist regime.

Trump subsequently appointed a series of ex-generals to top cabinet and administration positions, including the Department of Homeland Security, Secretary of

Defense and National Security Adviser.

This was followed by persistent efforts by Trump to organize a military parade within the United States, which had been scheduled for November 10 but was then delayed for sometime next year. Funding for the parade was included in the military budget adopted earlier this year with bipartisan support.

Then, in the runup to the 2018 midterm elections, Trump announced the deployment of thousands of troops to the US-Mexico border. The administration has used the caravan of migrants from Central America as a calculated pretext to mobilize the military within the United States and create the precedent for its use in domestic policing—an illegal action in violation of the Posse Comitatus Act.

Following the call with the military on Thursday, Trump reiterated his threat that the “military may use lethal force” against the migrants.

The efforts of the Trump administration to cultivate its direct connections to sections of the military and police forces are motivated by several interrelated factors. There is first of all the intense conflicts within the state, which have centered on issues of foreign policy. Trump’s attack on the courts have been accompanied by attacks on the media and threats to take criminal actions against his opponents. Significantly, the Thanksgiving call was made directly to lower-level commanders, bypassing the Joint Chiefs and top generals, who have tended to align with Trump’s opponents within the ruling class and state apparatus.

More fundamentally, all factions of the ruling class are terrified by the growth of social tensions and opposition within the United States. Trump’s strategy throughout his administration has been to develop a far-right political movement, based on appeals to extreme nationalism, in which the military and police agencies would play a central role. With the military deployment to the US-Mexico border, this strategy is taking on an ever more overtly extralegal and fascistic character.

Trump’s opponents within the ruling class also support increasingly authoritarian methods of rule, though in a somewhat different form. They have focused their campaign on the elevation of the CIA and intelligence agencies and the promotion of Internet censorship and other attacks on free speech and democratic rights under the guise of combatting “fake

news” and “Russian meddling.”

The Trump administration itself is the outcome of an extended process that has seen a vast expansion of the role of the military and intelligence agencies in domestic politics. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, under the pretext of the “war on terror,” the Bush administration enacted a raft of repressive legislation, established the Department of Homeland Security, and created the US Northern Command, which for the first time established a military command for operations within the United States.

Under the Obama administration, these measures were developed further, with the White House asserting the power to assassinate or militarily detain anyone, on the say-so of the president, including on US soil.

Now, against the backdrop of growing social unrest, signs of renewed economic crisis and ruling-class preparations for global war, the Trump administration is assuming an ever more overtly authoritarian character. Trump himself clearly has in mind the upcoming 2020 elections. He is well aware that he came to power in 2016 without a majority of the popular vote, winning the elections only due to the constitutional anachronism of the Electoral College.

The attack on the Central American immigrants has provided Trump with the opportunity to rule more and more directly through the military and police. Developments over the past two years are not a series of coincidences. Trump has a game plan, with cards still up his sleeve.



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