

Trump threatens Alec Baldwin, calls for “retribution” against NBC

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President Donald Trump posted two thuggish tweets Sunday morning attacking actor Alec Baldwin’s impersonation of the press conference at which he announced an unconstitutional declaration of national emergency to circumvent Congress and appropriate funds for the military to build his border wall.

Baldwin, who has frequently mimicked Trump on NBC’s satirical “Saturday Night Live” program, mocked the president in a skit broadcast on Saturday night’s episode.

In what can only be described as an incitement to violence by his fascistic base, Trump tweeted: “Nothing funny about tired Saturday Night Live on Fake News NBC! Question is, how do the Networks get away with these total Republican hit jobs without retribution? Likewise for many other shows? Very unfair and should be looked into. This is the real Collusion!”

A few minutes later he fired off a second tweet repeating what has become a standard attack line: “THE RIGGED AND CORRUPT MEDIA IS THE ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE!”

The use of terms like “hit job” and “retribution” reflect the gangsterism that pervades the Trump White House and the American financial oligarchy it represents. There is no precedent in US presidential history for such a direct incitement of violence against a public personality.

Baldwin responded with his own tweet later on Sunday, expressing entirely warranted fears about the implications of Trump’s threat: “I wonder if a sitting President exhorting his followers that my role in a TV comedy qualifies me as an enemy of the people constitutes a threat to my safety and that of my family?”

Sunday’s incident was no aberration for Trump, who

repeatedly encouraged violence against political opponents and protesters during his 2016 election campaign. His campaign rallies regularly featured chants of “Lock her up!” referring to his Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton, and appeals to his supporters to attack protesters and journalists in and around the venue.

To cite a few of many examples:

On February 22, 2016, at a rally in Las Vegas, Trump denounced a protester, declaring, “I’d like to punch him in the face, I tell ya.” He added, “You know what they used to do to guys like that when they were in a place like this? They’d be carried out on a stretcher.”

The following month, at a Florida press conference, Trump was asked about a supporter at a North Carolina rally who sucker-punched a young African-American man in the face as the protester was being frog-marched out of the arena. Trump replied, “The audience hit back and that’s what we need a little bit more of.”

That same month, Trump’s campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, grabbed a woman reporter by the arm and violently shoved her away when she sought to approach Trump after a Florida rally.

Trump has made provocative attacks on the media a standard part of his political repertoire. Taking advantage of popular disgust with the McCarthyite-style anti-Russia campaign of much of the corporate media, promoting the Democratic Party’s attack on Trump as an agent of Vladimir Putin, Trump has repeatedly attacked freedom of speech and the press.

At his political rallies, he routinely points to the journalists and cameramen in the hall and denounces them as enemies. Just eight days ago, at a rally in the border city of El Paso, Texas, where Trump delivered another racist anti-immigrant rant, one of his supporters attacked a BBC cameraman.

Four months ago, a Trump enthusiast mailed a dozen pipe bombs to CNN and Trump critics, including actor Robert De Niro.

Trump has suggested that NBC station licenses be challenged because of the network's unfavorable coverage. The Democrats, for their part, pursue their own attack on speech and press freedom through their campaign for censorship of social media and the internet.

The president's exhortation to violence is part of a calculated strategy to create a base for a fascistic movement. He is likely feeling emboldened in this by the feckless response of the media and the Democrats to his illegal emergency declaration, which marks an irreversible step toward the establishment of a presidential dictatorship.

Major media outlets, from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* to the broadcast networks and cable news channels, have downplayed the fundamental character of the collapse of democratic and constitutional processes embodied in Trump's authoritarian move. Instead, they have treated the seizure of quasi-dictatorial powers and mobilization of the military to police the US-Mexican border, in violation of the Posse Comitatus Act, as little more than an electoral stratagem. There have been virtually no calls for Trump's impeachment.

There are precedents for US presidents attacking the press and seeking to intimidate critical voices. In 1969, Richard Nixon put Tom and Dick Smothers on his "enemies list" and used his connections with CBS executives to get "The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour" canceled. Nixon threatened the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* when they released the Pentagon Papers and publicly vilified the *Post* when it exposed the Watergate conspiracy.

In September of 2001, George W. Bush's press secretary, Ari Fleischer, issued a threat against the comedian Bill Maher, who had criticized Bush's characterization of the 9/11 suicide bombers as "cowards" and suggested that, however horrendous their actions, their personal courage compared favorably to that of US pilots who drop bombs and missiles on defenseless populations. Fleischer warned "all Americans that they need to watch what they say, watch what they do. This is not a time for remarks like that; there never is."

However, these attacks were not accompanied by direct incitements to violence. And the backlash from the media and sections of the political establishment was considerably stronger than today.

Trump's threats against Baldwin and NBC have evoked only the most muted and cowardly response from the corporate media and the Democrats. The *New York Times* failed to carry a single article on the issue in its Monday print edition. Online, it posted a snide comment in the "Arts" section headlined "A Man You Can Bait with a Skit." The article, by James Poniewozik, noted that Trump has "groused" about "Saturday Night Live" before and treated Trump's new threats as little more than a joke.

Similarly, the *Washington Post* ignored Trump's tweets against Baldwin in its print edition and relegated its online coverage to a complacent and dismissive comment in the "Arts and Entertainment" section.

None of the broadcast networks, including NBC, mentioned either Trump's attack or Baldwin's response on either their morning or evening news programs. No statement was issued by NBC and nothing on the issue was posted on the official website of "Saturday Night Live."



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