

Pentagon brass on “red alert” over Trump’s coup plotting

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The senior US military command is operating at what amounts to a state of high alert in anticipation of a possible coup attempt by President Donald Trump over the next month aimed at overturning the results of the November presidential election.

This heightened sense of danger was triggered by an extraordinary December 17 interview given by Gen. Michael Flynn (ret.), Trump’s first national security adviser and now pardoned felon, to Newsmax, the far-right cable television outlet that has faithfully backed Trump’s fraudulent claims of a stolen election.

Flynn asserted the president’s power to declare martial law and suggested that he could deploy “military capabilities” in the swing states where he lost to “basically rerun an election.” In other words, voters in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Georgia and other “battleground” states where Democratic candidate Joe Biden won would be herded back to the polls at the point of a bayonet to ensure that they sustained Trump’s grip on the White House.

Even more ominously, the retired three-star general was invited to the White House the next day—along with Sydney Powell, Trump’s former election fraud lawyer who pushed theories that the vote had been rigged by, among others, the deceased Venezuelan leader Hugo Chavez—where the feasibility of imposing martial law was the subject of a heated debate.

The extraordinary tension within the Pentagon’s top brass has been made clear over the past several days in a series of reports by media commentators with close ties to the US military-intelligence apparatus.

Prominent among these warnings is a *Washington Post* column by David Ignatius titled “Until Biden’s win is certified, the US remains vulnerable.” Ignatius has long served as a conduit for information that the Pentagon and the CIA want leaked to the public.

The United States “will be in the danger zone until the formal certification of Joe Biden’s election victory on Jan. 6, because potential domestic and foreign turmoil could give President Trump an excuse to cling to power,” Ignatius writes.

On January 6, Congress is scheduled to formally count the vote of the Electoral College, which Biden won 306 to 232, and certify his election as president of the United States. Trump has called for his Republican supporters in the House and Senate to derail this process, while summoning his far-right supporters to take to the streets of Washington the same day. “Big protest in DC on January 6th. Be there it will be wild!” he tweeted, raising the specter of violence.

Violent confrontations in the streets of the US capital, Ignatius warns, could provide Trump with the pretext to “invoke the Insurrection Act to mobilize the military.”

Ignatius also points to Trump’s purge of the Pentagon’s top civilian leadership and installation of a cabal of fascistic loyalists. Acting Secretary of Defense Mark Esper was sacked both because of his reluctance to support a military strike against Iran and for his public opposition to Trump’s proposal to invoke the Insurrection Act and deploy regular Army troops in the streets to attack anti-police violence

demonstrations last summer.

“Trump’s final weeks in office will also be a tinder box because of the danger of turmoil abroad,” writes Ignatius, pointing to recent rocket attacks on the sprawling US embassy complex in Baghdad’s Green Zone and Trump’s tweeted threat of retaliation against Iran. He also cites the January 3 anniversary of last year’s US drone assassination of senior Iranian leader Qassem Suleimani and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

The reality is that the US is steadily escalating its military threats against Iran. In the latest action, the US Navy has sent the nuclear-powered submarine USS Georgia, armed with cruise missiles, along with accompanying warships into the Persian Gulf, joining the USS Nimitz carrier strike group already deployed there.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* warned in a November 17 perspective titled “Amid electoral coup plot, Trump threatens catastrophic war on Iran”:

An attack on Iran, and the inevitable Iranian retaliation, with the potential deaths of large numbers of US troops, would provide Trump with the pretext for imposing martial law and refusing to surrender the White House. With 62 days remaining before the scheduled presidential inauguration, the danger of such a provocation is ever-present.

Ignatius concludes his ominous column with the reassurance that “Trump won’t succeed in subverting the Constitution, but he can do enormous damage over the next weeks.” The solution, he says, is for Republicans to go the White House and tell its president, “This must stop.”

CNN, meanwhile, reports that “there is growing anxiety” within the military over what Trump may do in the weeks before he is scheduled to leave office. “Will the President order some unexpected military action, such as a strike on Iran, or will he somehow draw the military into his efforts to overthrow the election results?” are the questions plaguing the Pentagon, according to the network.

Citing nearly a dozen active duty senior officers, who spoke on condition of anonymity, the report states that the officers have been drawing up “lists” of every potential action Trump could take over the next month, including further purges of top officials, including uniformed personnel.

The report cites a statement issued by Gen. James McConville, the Army chief of staff, and Ryan McCarthy, the Trump-appointed Army secretary, declaring, “There is no role for the US military in determining the outcome of an American election.” Senior officers interviewed by CNN noted that in living memory no one has felt compelled to issue such a declaration, amounting to an assurance that the American military will

not carry out a coup.

CNN cited several officers as saying that “for the remainder of his term, if Trump issues any orders, the key will be whether they are determined to be legal. If they are not legal, and the President cannot be talked out of potential illegal orders, it could raise difficult questions about what senior military leaders do next.”

For his part, anti-Trump Republican columnist Bill Kristol reported via Twitter that he had been “reliably told senior military officials in the Pentagon are more, not less, alarmed than they were a few weeks ago when Mark Esper was fired. The new crew of Trump loyalists in the most senior civilian positions don’t seem there only to burnish their resumes, as one person put it. They’re trying to figure out, in coordination with people in the White House, ‘how to make things happen.’” The discussions taking place within the top brass, he said, are “unprecedented.”

The *Washington Post*, meanwhile, editorialized on December 26 that Trump’s actions over the next few weeks “could make the rest of his chaotic presidency look placid.” It added, “The possibilities include strange orders to the armed forces ...”

Citing the declaration by the Army chief of staff and secretary that the military would not determine the outcome of the election, the *Post* stated: “Americans can appreciate these statements—while feeling horrified that they are necessary. Necessary for Army brass to say that the military will not help stage a coup.”

This is hardly the only reason to feel horrified. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff may view General Flynn’s agitation as a threat to national stability, as well as to the cohesion and discipline of the armed forces themselves, there is no reason to doubt that Flynn has contacts and sympathizers within the officer corps that share his fascistic ideology. Whether or not they are sufficient in number and organization to launch a coup, this time, a threshold has been crossed. A military coup in the United States is no longer merely imaginable, but constitutes a real and present danger.

In a *Newsweek* article titled “Donald Trump’s Martial-Law Talk Has Military on Red Alert,” veteran military affairs analyst William Arkin reported that “ranking officers have discussed what they would do if the president declared martial law. And military commands responsible for Washington DC are engaged in secret contingency planning in case the armed forces are called upon to maintain or restore civil order during the inauguration and transition period.”

Arkin added that while senior officers insisted they would not join a coup to overturn the election, “they worry that the military could get sucked into a crisis of Trump’s making, particularly if the president tries to rally private militias and pro-Trump paramilitaries in an effort to disrupt the transition and bring violence to the capital.”

Arkin quoted an unnamed former Northern Command (NORTHCOM) commander as stating, “Though I’m confident that the uniformed military leadership has their heads screwed on right, the craziness is unprecedented and the possibilities are endless.”

Referring to a statement made by Trump in March that he had “the right to do a lot of things that people don’t even know about,” Arkin reported that during deliberations on declaring an emergency over the coronavirus pandemic, Trump was “briefed by his national security team on a broad range of extraordinary powers available to him, including secret military plans to suppress civil disturbances in the ‘National Capital Region’ and extraordinary powers contained in Top Secret continuity of government plans, both first revealed in *Newsweek* .” Also included are secret Presidential Emergency Action Documents (PEADs) drafted during the Cold War era that allow for the declaration of an “unlimited national emergency.”

In an article titled “Trump’s final days try to turn the military into a political pawn” published on *The Hill* website, Dov S. Zakheim, a former undersecretary of defense under George W. Bush, warned that while senior military officials have stated they will not interfere in the election,

“Trump could choose to invoke the Insurrection Act, or issue some other order that is less clearly illegal but that would put the military on America’s streets.”

Making reference to *Seven Days in May*, the best-selling 1962 novel, and subsequent film, on a military coup in the United States, Zakheim writes, “Today, however, it is the military that is a critical bulwark of American democracy and civilian control as the Trump era winds down to its final days ...”

That the military is exalted as the guarantor of “democracy and civilian control” is testimony to the disintegration of democratic forms of rule in the United States under the impact of unending war, ceaseless attacks on democratic rights and historically unprecedented levels of social inequality. Trump’s bid to overthrow the US Constitution is the outcome of this process, not its cause.

He has been aided and abetted by the Democrats and the corporate media, which have made a deliberate decision to downplay and conceal from the public the profound threats and conspiracies emanating from the White House.

Biden and the Democrats have chosen to ignore Trump’s refusal to concede the election and his White House meetings to discuss the viability of imposing martial law to remain in office.

On Monday, Biden delivered a speech in which he complained that the cabal of fascistic loyalists installed by Trump at the Pentagon was imposing “roadblocks” to his team “getting all the information that we need from the outgoing administration in key national security areas.” His concern, he said, was to preclude “any window of confusion or catch-up that our adversaries may try to exploit.”

That Biden’s transition team is being locked out of the Pentagon because Trump’s appointees are attempting to turn it into the cockpit of an extra-constitutional coup to overturn the election is deliberately ignored.

The overriding concern of the Democratic Party is not to expose and defeat Trump’s conspiracies, but rather to prevent masses of working people becoming politically conscious of the danger and entering into struggle against it. The Democrats view such a revolt from below as an intolerable threat to the interests of Wall Street and US imperialism that they defend.

If Biden succeeds in occupying the White House on January 20 on the basis of assurances to the Pentagon and the ruling oligarchy that he will uphold their interests, the assault on democratic rights and threat of dictatorship laid bare in Trump’s plots will only continue and deepen.



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