

Trump sought Justice Department intervention to hijack election

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President Donald Trump discussed plans to oust the acting attorney general and install a substitute who would use the power of the Justice Department to overturn the result of the presidential election, according to two reports by the *New York Times* over the weekend.

The reports shed light both on the extreme lengths to which Trump was prepared to go to retain power and the role of Republican congressmen in assisting his conspiracies, even before the events of January 6, when fascist thugs invaded the Capitol and temporarily shut down the counting of electoral votes that sealed Trump's defeat at the hands of Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

Saturday's edition of the *Times* revealed that Trump sought to prevail upon Acting Attorney General Jeffrey Rosen to pressure the Georgia state legislature to reverse the certification of the November 3 election, won in that state by Biden, and award the state's electoral votes to himself.

When Rosen balked, Trump considered replacing him with a subordinate, Jeffrey Clark, head of the Environment and Natural Resources Division, who was reportedly willing to take action in Georgia. Clark informed Rosen of the plan and a conference call among top Justice Department officials followed, at which they all agreed to resign en masse if Rosen was fired and replaced by Clark.

The *Times* account describes a high-stakes meeting at the White House on the night of Sunday, January 3, at which Rosen, Clark, acting Deputy Attorney General Richard O'Donoghue, Steven Engel, head of the Office of Legal Counsel, the Justice Department's in-house lawyer, White House Counsel Pat Cipollone and other aides discussed with Trump his options in relation to Georgia.

Only the prospect of mass resignations—a re-enactment of the notorious “Saturday Night Massacre” of the Nixon administration, when top officials resigned rather than obey Nixon's orders to fire the Watergate special prosecutor—apparently dissuaded Trump from ousting Rosen there and then. This would have set the stage for an open political eruption in Washington on January 4, the day before the Georgia runoff vote for the US Senate and two

days before Congress was to receive and count the electoral votes submitted by the states.

The White House meeting came only hours after the *Washington Post* published a transcript of Trump's telephone conversation with Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, in which Trump demanded that the Republican official “find” the necessary votes to overturn Biden's victory in the state.

Trump began pressuring Rosen as soon as he had announced on Twitter that Attorney General William Barr was stepping down, even before Rosen officially replaced Barr on December 23. But Rosen was unwilling to take the action demanded by the coup plotter in the White House.

On Sunday, January 23, the *Times* published a follow-up article detailing the role of Representative Scott Perry of Pennsylvania, an ultra-right Trump supporter, who served as the conduit from Trump to Jeffrey Clark, introducing the Justice Department official to the president as a supporter of his view that the election had been stolen by the Democrats.

After Perry's introduction of Clark, a Philadelphia native, Trump called the lower-ranking Justice Department official several times without informing his boss, Rosen, although the department's rules prescribe that presidential contact should go through the attorney general or deputy attorney general.

The *Times* revelations triggered demands for information from Senate Democrats, who threatened to investigate Trump's efforts to use the Department of Justice “to further Trump's efforts to subvert the results of the 2020 presidential election,” as Senator Richard Durbin, incoming chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, described it.

Senator Charles Schumer of New York, the new majority leader, called on the department's inspector general, Michael E. Horowitz, to investigate “this attempted sedition.” Horowitz is already investigating the resignation of Byung J. Pak, the US attorney in Atlanta, who quit in late December under White House pressure to intervene in the state election dispute.

Trump reportedly sought other actions from the

Department of Justice, including the filing of a lawsuit seeking a Supreme Court challenge of Biden's victory in the Electoral College, according to a report Saturday by the *Wall Street Journal*.

Representative Perry is an Iraq War veteran and retired general in the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, and thus has many connections inside the Pentagon. He is a member of the ultra-right House Freedom Caucus and has defended many fascistic conspiracy theories, including QAnon, as well as claims that the mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada in 2017 was the outcome of "terrorist infiltration through the southern border."

He also voted to overturn the electoral votes of Arizona and his own state of Pennsylvania, although the latter votes were determined by the same election in which he retained his own seat in Congress. Apparently the congressman believes that ballots should be counted when they are votes for himself but not when the votes are cast for Democrats.

The conflict within the Justice Department only underscores the deeply reactionary, antidemocratic and unconstitutional character of Trump's campaign to overturn the 2020 elections, in which he had the support of a majority of the Republican members of the House of Representatives and many Republican senators.

But Trump's demands were too much for most Justice Department officials, even though many of them were brought into the department by William Barr, the reactionary advocate of presidential authority who defended police state methods during the summer. Barr was at Trump's side on June 1, 2020, when the president mobilized troops in Washington D.C., cleared unarmed protesters from Lafayette Square in front of the White House, and threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act to mobilize active-duty troops against protesters across the country.

Barr gave a series of speeches advocating a perspective of presidential authority little short of dictatorship, but Trump evidently deemed him too "soft" after he gave an interview to the press in mid-November in which he declared there was no evidence of vote fraud sufficient to change the outcome of the election. Trump then pressured Barr into resigning a month before the new administration took office, in the hopes that his replacement would be more amenable.

The role both of Justice Department officials and congressmen should be the subject of public hearings to investigate the events of January 6. It is evident that a large section of the Republican Party in Congress, as well as officials in many federal departments, were involved in the activities that culminated in an armed assault on Congress, whose purpose was evidently to take hostages and force the postponement of Biden's inauguration, if not its outright cancellation.

The Biden administration and the congressional Democrats want to cover up these connections as part of their effort to preserve a "strong" Republican Party, as Biden put it, and create an effectively bipartisan government, even though the Democrats ultimately won the Senate, the House and the White House, giving them full political control in Washington.

As part of this cover-up, the Justice Department and the FBI—now under the direction of the Democratic administration—are discussing not even charging hundreds of those who invaded the Capitol on January 6, according to a report Sunday in the *Washington Post*. The effect would be to limit prosecution to those most obviously linked to violent acts inside the Capitol, many of them already well known because of live-streaming of the attack on the internet, while the majority of those who participated in the assault would suffer no consequences.

There is widespread popular hostility to the attack on the Capitol, reflected in the more than 200,000 tips that have been received by police from people who recognized participants from the internet and media videos. The Biden administration, however, would prefer to jail a few of the most notorious fascists, while concealing the connections that undoubtedly exist between the rioters and congressional Republicans and the Trump White House.

Meanwhile, Senate Majority Leader Schumer has announced that the impeachment trial of President Trump will begin on Tuesday, February 9, with the hope that it will be completed that week. Such a timetable would ensure that the trial was limited to Trump's own personal role in the events of January 6, and the wider connections would not be brought to light or made public.



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