

Pentagon orders “stand-down” over fascist threat in US military

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The threat of a fascist military coup in America that erupted to the surface with the storming of the US Capitol on January 6 has not ended; it has only just begun.

This is the only serious conclusion one can draw from the extraordinary order issued Thursday by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin for a “stand-down” by the entire US military and its 2.1 million personnel to “discuss the problem of extremism in the ranks.”

The order followed a meeting between Austin, a retired general and former commander of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), civilian service chiefs and the uniformed Joint Chiefs of Staff which made clear that the Pentagon brass has no clear idea of the extent of the spread of fascist and white supremacist forces in the military, nor has it carried out any systematic effort to uproot them.

Following the meeting, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters that the Capitol coup attempt had been a “wake-up call” for the military. “Extremism” in the military was “not an insignificant problem,” he said, and the number of troops involved was “not as small as anyone would like.”

The meeting of the top brass convened by Austin follows reports that former and active-duty military personnel comprised up to one-fifth of those arrested for storming the Capitol building in an attempt to prevent Congress from certifying Joseph Biden’s election as president and the defeat of Donald Trump.

It was clear from the Pentagon press conference that the senior command has no coherent plan for confronting the issue. “We don’t know how we’re going to be able to get after this in a meaningful, productive, tangible way, and that is why he had this meeting today, and that is certainly why he ordered this stand-down,” Kirby said.

The “stand-down,” which is to be organized across the sprawling US military over the next 60 days, as yet appears to be conceived as little more than commanding

officers delivering pep talks to their units professing the Pentagon’s opposition to “extremism.”

In no sense, clearly, will the “stand-down” signal any reduction in US military acts of aggression and provocation around the globe. On the contrary, the first weeks of the Biden administration have seen US warships stage provocative deployments in the Black Sea and the Strait of Taiwan, while US B-52 bombers are continuing their menacing overflights of the Persian Gulf.

The role of current and former military personnel in the January 6 events has emerged with increasing clarity over the past month. Among those killed in the coup attempt was Air Force veteran Ashli Babbitt, shot by police as she attempted to break into the Speaker’s Lobby.

Among those criminally charged is Lt. Col. Larry Rendall Brock, a retired Air Force officer who broke into the Senate chamber holding zip ties, presumably intended for use in seizing members of Congress as hostages. Meanwhile, active-duty Army Captain Emily Rainey is under investigation for organizing buses to the Trump rally from the area of Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

In the storming of the Capitol, militias that recruit former and current soldiers, including most prominently the Oath Keepers, played a pivotal role, organizing military-style squads to breach the entrances to the building. Former military personnel in the Oath Keepers—which continues to call for its supporters to fight “against the communists and deep state traitors who have stolen the White House”—have been charged with conspiracy, as have members of the Proud Boys, whom Trump infamously told to “stand back and stand by.”

Those participating in the physical storming of the Capitol were only the most visible military participants in Trump’s coup plot. Retired Gen. Michael Flynn, Trump’s first national security adviser, played a leading role in the “stop the steal” campaign based on the fabricated claims of a stolen election, which set the stage

for the January 6 coup. He was a vocal advocate of Trump invoking the Insurrection Act and imposing martial law to overturn the election and establish what would have amounted to a presidential dictatorship.

Flynn's extreme right-wing politics are undoubtedly shared by other senior officers still in uniform. Still unexplained by the Pentagon is the role played by his brother, Lt. Gen. Charles A. Flynn, who participated in the deliberations that led the Army to delay the dispatch of National Guard troops to the Capitol until the mayhem was over.

Trump clearly had a plan to utilize sections of the military and neutralize others in his attempt to overturn the election and hold onto power. In the immediate aftermath of his defeat at the polls, he carried out a wholesale purge of the Pentagon's top leadership, installing extreme right-wing loyalists in key positions, headed by former Special Forces Colonel Christopher Miller.

Nearly a year before the election, Trump had demonstratively sought to curry favor with the military's Special Operations personnel with his lionizing of, and pardons for, convicted war criminals like Navy SEAL Edward Gallagher.

There is no doubt that the Trump administration cultivated the growth of extreme-right and outright fascist elements within the military. The roots, however, run far deeper. They lie most fundamentally in the inextricably linked deepening of the crisis of US and world capitalism and the corresponding crumbling and disintegration of democratic forms of rule.

A key element in this process has been the inexorable growth of US militarism, as American capitalism has sought to offset its economic decline by increasing reliance on armed might. The result has been 30 years of uninterrupted war waged by Washington in the Middle East and Central Asia. The use of an "all volunteer" force to wage these wars, in many cases through multiple deployments, and the concentration of immense political power in the hands the Pentagon's combatant commanders, has steadily eroded the constitutional principle of civilian control of the military.

In his brilliant June 1933 essay on the rise of Hitler's Nazis in Germany, "What Is National Socialism?", Leon Trotsky wrote:

The banner of National Socialism was raised by upstarts from the lower and middle commanding

ranks of the old army. Decorated with medals for distinguished service, commissioned and noncommissioned officers could not believe that their heroism and sufferings for the Fatherland had not only come to naught, but also gave them no special claims to gratitude. Hence their hatred of the revolution and the proletariat.

Among the 2.7 million military personnel who have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, there are doubtless not a few who share similar sentiments about their own sufferings in Washington's dirty colonial-style wars having "come to naught."

The alternatives posed in 1933—socialism or fascism—are the same ones that now confront the working class in the United States and internationally.

The combined threat of militarism and fascism is by no means a uniquely American phenomenon. From Germany to Brazil, Spain and across the globe, there is a growth of both fascist elements within the security forces and support by the military for fascistic movements.

The role played by the Democrats and Biden demonstrates the futility and danger in relying on any section of the capitalist ruling class, its parties or institutions to counter these threats or defend democratic rights.

Together with the media and virtually the whole of the pseudoleft, they have sought to cover up the high level conspiracy and role of the military in the events of January 6. Instead, Biden appeals for "unity" with his Republican "colleagues" who provoked and directly aided the coup attempt. They are united in a common defense of the interests of a ruling financial oligarchy and in the imposition of a homicidal policy that places profits above lives in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Defeating the threat of fascism and military dictatorship and the defense of democratic rights can be achieved only through the methods of class struggle and the fight for the socialist transformation of society.



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