

Senate hearing on January 6 coup: D.C. police were warned of armed attack on Congress

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On Tuesday, the Senate Homeland Security Committee and the Senate Rules and Administration Committee held a joint hearing on the security failures that allowed the US Capitol building to be overrun by a pro-Trump mob headed by far-right militia groups and white supremacists on January 6.

The testimony of former and current police officials at Tuesday's event, the first public congressional hearing into the attempted coup, highlighted their complete failure to respond to clear warnings contained in their own intelligence assessments and those of the FBI of a violent and a coordinated attack on the Capitol.

In the course of the hearing, the heads of Metro D.C. Police and the US Capitol Police at the time of the insurrection admitted that their departments possessed intelligence reports warning of a violent attack on Congress in advance of the storming of the Capitol.

But in the place of any serious explanation for the stand-down of security forces in the face of numerous threats to Congress from fascistic forces mobilized by former President Donald Trump, the Democratic chairs of the two committees suggested a narrative of "intelligence" or "communications" failures, which began to fall apart even as the hearing progressed.

The witnesses were the former chief of the Capitol Police, Steven Sund, the acting chief of the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department, Robert Contee, the former Senate sergeant-at-arms, Michael Stenger, and the former House sergeant-at-arms, Paul Irving.

For the first time, Sund acknowledged in his testimony that the Capitol Police were sent a copy of an explicit warning issued by the FBI office in nearby Norfolk, Virginia the day before the attempted coup, stating that violent Trump supporters were coming to D.C. and talking about waging "war."

The FBI memo cited direct threats from pro-Trump elements on an unnamed online message board. The posters made clear they were coming to D.C. to take Congress hostage in order to overturn the results of the election.

Images retrieved from the message board and included in the FBI memo included maps of the tunnels under the Capitol complex along with rally points in states such as Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts and South Carolina for the insurrectionists to meet up prior to heading to Washington.

In January, the *Washington Post* obtained a copy of the memo, which read, in part: "An online thread discussed specific calls for violence to include stating 'Be ready to fight. Congress needs to hear glass breaking, doors being kicked in, and blood from their BLM and Pantifa slave soldiers being spilled. Get violent. Stop calling this a march, or rally, or a protest. Go there ready for war. We get our President or we die. NOTHING else will achieve this goal.'"

Acting D.C. Metropolitan Police Chief Contee acknowledged that his police department also received the FBI memo in the form of an email. He testified that it did not occur to him that the email from the FBI on the eve of the January 6 "Save America" march was a priority.

Sund acknowledged that the intelligence bulletin had been relayed to the Capitol Police through its Joint Terrorism Task Force on January 5, but claimed that neither he nor anyone else in the police leadership saw the memo. Sund said he became aware that the memo had been received by the intelligence department within the Capitol Police less than 24 hours prior to the congressional hearing.

Homeland Security Committee Chairman Gary Peters (Democrat of Michigan) questioned Sund as to why the FBI memo was not relayed to him after it was received by his department's intelligence department. Sund could not provide an explanation, merely saying, "I know that is something that is going to be looked at. I think that information would have been helpful to be aware of."

In a statement released on Tuesday, the FBI said the Norfolk memo was shared with the FBI Washington Field Office's Joint Terrorism Task Force within 40 minutes of its being issued, and was posted on the Law Enforcement Enterprise Portal, to which law enforcement agencies across the country have access.

The Norfolk memo was also shared with the FBI field office in D.C. and agents in that office were briefed within an hour of its arrival, FBI Assistant Director in Charge Steven M. D’Antuono told the *Post*.

Peters also referenced an internal intelligence document produced by the Capitol Police on January 3. The memorandum warned that unlike previous “Make America Great Again” rallies held in November and December, which resulted in numerous arrests, stabbings and assaults by Proud Boy fascists on counter-protesters, the pro-Trump mob assembled on January 6 would not be targeting counter-protesters, but rather members of Congress.

Peters quoted the memo as warning that “Congress itself is the target,” that “members of the Proud Boys and other extremist groups would be in the crowd,” and that Trump supporters saw the January 6 congressional certification of the Electoral College vote as “the last opportunity to overturn the results of the presidential election.”

Sund admitted to seeing the report on January 3, but testified that the only action he ordered the Capitol Police to take in response was to “expand the perimeter” around the Capitol complex.

Despite the mountain of evidence that actionable intelligence was directly sent to the various police agencies charged with defending the Capitol in advance of the attack, the testifying police chiefs maintained there was an “intelligence failure.”

In a written statement to the committees, former House Sergeant-at-Arms Irving said, “The intelligence was not that there would be a coordinated assault on the Capitol, nor was that contemplated in any of the inter-agency discussions that I attended in the days before the attack.”

Irving added that the Capitol Police had previously assessed the potential for civil disobedience as “remote” or “improbable.”

Under conditions of direct incitement by then-President Trump and his political allies within the Republican Party, following months of lies about a stolen election, and in light of documents warning of a violent assault on Congress, the assertion that the problem was a “lack of intelligence” lacks any credibility whatsoever.

Moreover, in their testimony on Tuesday, both Sund and Contee said they were baffled by the Pentagon’s failure to immediately respond positively to calls from the police departments and others to authorize the deployment of National Guard troops to repel the mob and protect Congress. In the event, no National Guard troops reached the Capitol until close to 6 p.m., hours after the insurrectionists first breached the Capitol.

Metro Police Chief Contee testified that he heard Sund on the phone “pleading with several Army officials” for Guard

support, and that he was “stunned at the response” Sund received.

Entirely absent from the Democratic senators’ questions was any discussion of the political aims of the insurrectionists—namely, to block the certification of the Electoral College vote, overturn the results of the election and maintain Trump in power as president-dictator.

Nor was there any mention of the political complicity of the bulk of the Republican Party and its leadership in Trump’s plot to overturn the election, including the refusal of then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell for weeks to acknowledge Joe Biden’s victory and Vice President Mike Pence’s support until the last minute for Trump’s big lie. The hearing was held less than two weeks after 43 of the 50 GOP senators voted to acquit Trump in the impeachment trial.

Among the Republican senators participating in the hearing were those who directly facilitated the attempted coup by opposing the certification of the election results, including Ted Cruz, Josh Hawley, Cindy Hyde-Smith and Rick Scott.

Instead of calling out their “Republican colleagues,” the Democrats, in line with the ceaseless calls for “unity” and defense of a “strong Republican Party” from the Biden White House, continued their cover-up of the vast scale of the coup conspiracy and the role of the Republican Party as an incubator of fascist forces. Amy Klobuchar, the chair of the Senate Rules Committee, set the tone in opening the hearing by praising the “bipartisan” spirit that had characterized its preparation.

Democratic Senator Tom Carper of Delaware offered the “failure to connect the dots” excuse used in the official cover-up surrounding the 9/11 terror attacks, suggesting that the virtual absence of security for the Capitol was the result of “a failure to communicate.”



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