How the January 6 hearing covered up Trump's co-conspirators

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In response to last Thursday's prime time, nationally televised hearing of the House Select Committee investigating the January 6, 2021 attack on the US Capitol, a WSWS perspective declared that there was a massive contradiction in the presentation of the events of that day.

On the one hand, the hearings "have revealed damning evidence that a powerful network within all branches of government almost abolished the Constitution and established a dictatorship…" On the other hand, this conspiracy had been reduced to a "one-man coup," in which Donald Trump embraced the mob attack on the US Capitol by thousands of his supporters, over the opposition of virtually every figure in his White House, his administration, and even his own family.

The falsity of this presentation can now be demonstrated in detail by a review of the transcript of the nearly three-hour hearing held last Thursday night. This was not some inadvertent defect in the presentation by the seven Democrats and two Republicans who comprise the committee. It was a deliberate political choice, to minimize the role of the military-intelligence apparatus and the Republican Party in Trump's attempted coup, to preserve these institutions of the capitalist state and to conceal from the American people the true dimensions of the coup and the ongoing threats to democratic rights.

The hearing was scheduled for prime time to attract the largest possible audience, and the remarks made by the leaders of the committee sought to sum up the entire series of eight, each at least two hours long.

Chairman Bennie Thompson was sidelined due to a COVID diagnosis, but he set the tone with an opening statement given remotely, in which he declared that Trump had rejected "the factually and legally correct sober advice of his knowledgeable and sensible advisers." The former president pursued his "scheme to cling to power … while he ignored his advisers, stood by, and watched it unfold on television."

Vice Chair Liz Cheney, the right-wing Republican and daughter of the former vice president, presided over the final hearing. She chimed in, "And as you will see today, Donald Trump's own White House counsel, his own White House staff, members of his own family all implored him to immediately intervene to condemn the violence and instruct his supporters to stand down, leave the Capitol, and disperse."

Similar comments were made by the two committee members who led the evening's presentation, Democrat Elaine Luria of Virginia and Republican Adam Kinzinger of Illinois.

Kinzinger is a former Air Force pilot who flew warplanes in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and is still a member of the Air Force Reserve. Luria, one of those we have labeled The CIA Democrats, was a 20-year career naval officer, in the course of which she "deployed six times to the Middle East and Western Pacific as a nuclear-trained surface warfare officer," rising to second in command of a guided missile cruiser. Upon retiring, she ran for Congress in 2018, winning a Republican-held seat in the Norfolk area, with its huge concentration of Navy bases and shipyards.

The two were chosen to lead the July 21 hearing in large measure because of their military backgrounds. The corporate media attributed this to the committee leaders' desire to frame the narrative of the final hearing as a demonstration that Trump, as commander in chief, was guilty of dereliction of duty in failing to respond to the attack on the US Capitol.

But there is another, more sinister, interpretation. By selecting Luria and Kinzinger, the committee was reassuring the CIA, the FBI and the military brass that the investigation would protect the military-intelligence apparatus, and would not expose those elements who were involved in Trump's coup plotting, either as direct collaborators or in a more passive, permissive role.

Covering up the destruction of evidence

The first session of the hearing, headed by Representative Luria, included what should have been the most dramatic revelation of the entire evening, but which was quickly swept under the rug: the systematic destruction of evidence relating to Trump's activities on the afternoon of January 6, 2021 and his contacts with high officials in the executive, legislative and judicial branches.

Luria gave a perfunctory recitation of a void in the evidentiary record that has no innocent explanation:

> On the screen is the Presidential call log from January 6th. As you can see, there's no official record of President Trump receiving or placing a call between 11:06 and 6:54 pm. As to what the President was doing that afternoon, the Presidential Daily Diary is also silent. It contains no information from the period between 1:21 pm. and 4:03 pm.. There are also no photos of President Trump during this critical period between 1:21 in the Oval Office and when he went outside to the Rose Garden after 4:00. The chief White House photographer wanted to take pictures because it was, in her words, very important for his archives and for history, but she was told, quote, "no photographs."

During the Watergate investigations that led to the forced resignation of President Richard Nixon in 1974, much attention was focused on an 18½ minute gap in the tape of a White House discussion three days after the Watergate break-in. (Nixon's personal secretary Rosemary Woods became an object of ridicule when she tried to demonstrate that the erasures were the inadvertent result of her stretching to answer the phone while transcribing).

The erasure of the January 6 records in the Trump White House reduces the 18½ minute gap to a molehill. But after Luria presented the single slide showing the vast scale of the missing evidence, the committee never

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returned to the subject. The corporate media quickly buried the issue, and did not raise the central question: Who erased the phone log, diary and other evidence, and why?

This was far beyond Trump's individual efforts, and required the collaboration of large numbers of military-intelligence personnel, who handle security and communications operations for the White House.

Covering up the role of the military-intelligence apparatus

Luria introduced a segment of the video deposition by former White House counsel Pat Cipollone, in which an unnamed investigator for the committee asked him about telephone conversations between Trump and other top government officials on January 6. Here is an excerpt:

UNKNOWN: So are you aware of any phone call by the President of the United States to the Secretary of Defense that day?

PAT CIPOLLONE: Not that I'm aware of, no.

UNKNOWN: Are you aware of any phone call by the President of United States to the attorney general of the United States that day?

PAT CIPOLLONE: No.

UNKNOWN: Are you aware of any phone call by the President of the United States to the Secretary of Homeland Security that day?

PAT CIPOLLONE: I'm not aware of that, no.

A similar line of questioning had been pursued with retired General Keith Kellogg, National Security Advisor to Vice President Pence, who was in the White House on that day, and with Trump aide Nicholas Luna. Their videotape depositions were also excerpted:

UNKNOWN: Did you ever hear the Vice President—or excuse me, the President ask for the National Guard?

KEITH KELLOGG: No.

UNKNOWN: Did you ever hear the President ask for a law enforcement response?

KEITH KELLOGG: No.

UNKNOWN: So as somebody who works in the national security space and with the National Security Council here, if there were going to be troops present or called up for a rally in Washington DC, for example, is that something that you would have been aware of?

KEITH KELLOGG: Yeah, I would have.

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UNKNOWN: Do you know if you asked anybody to reach out to any of those that we just listed off? National Guard, DOD, FBI, Homeland Security, Secret Service, Mayor Bowser, or the Capitol Police about the situation in the Capitol.

NICHOLAS LUNA: I am not aware of any of those requests. No, sir.

The wording of these Q&As is quite careful. Cipollone was "not aware" of such phone calls (he was unlikely to have been aware unless he was in Trump's office or participating in the call). Luna was also "not aware." General Kellogg "did not hear" a request made for the National Guard.

The committee, however, presented these brief excerpts as though they were evidence that Trump had no contact with top officials of the national security apparatus. Luria said later, in her closing remarks, "As you heard earlier in the hearing, the President did not call the Vice President or anyone in the military, federal law enforcement, or DC government, not a single person."

In the absence of phone logs for a period of *nearly eight hours*, no evidence could be presented that Trump did not call anyone in the Pentagon or DHS, only that such conversations were not overheard by Cipollone, Kellogg or Luna.

Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller and Acting DHS Secretary Chad Wolf were just recently appointed to their positions by the president, with Miller parachuted into the Pentagon a week after the election, along with two top aides who were fanatic Trump acolytes. It is quite likely that Trump called Miller, not to request the deployment of the National Guard, but to make sure it was delayed as long as possible, or blocked altogether.

One aspect of the committee's account of the events entirely undermines the claim that Miller and Trump had no contact January 6. Miller is reported to have received an urgent call from Vice President Pence, who was sheltering in the Capitol Hill garage, driven there by rioters howling for his blood. Pence strongly urged Miller to send troops to the Capitol to rescue Congress and himself.

The vice president is not in the chain of command, and his "very explicit, very direct, unambiguous orders"—as they were described by General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—would have no legal force. Miller's next step would have been to call the president directly, and confirm whether Pence was speaking for the "commander in chief."

Covering up for Trump's White House co-conspirators

Similar word-juggling was employed in providing a political amnesty for all those White House aides and Republican leaders who were backing Trump's coup, either openly or tacitly, in the course of January 6. Representative Kinzinger, the co-leader of the session, introduced a set of video clips, again from Cipollone, about his belief that Trump needed to issue a stronger statement calling on the mob to leave the Capitol, after his initial tweet at 2:24 p.m. in which he attacked Pence as a coward. The transcript reads:

UNKNOWN: So your advice was to tell people to leave the Capitol and it took over two hours when there were subsequent statements made, tweets put forth, that in your view were insufficient. Did you continue, Mr. Cipollone, throughout the period of time up until 4:17—continue, you and others, to push for a stronger statement?

PAT CIPOLLONE: Yes.

UNKNOWN: Were you joined in that effort by Ivanka Trump?

PAT CIPOLLONE: Yes.

UNKNOWN: Eric Herschmann?

PAT CIPOLLONE: Yes.

UNKNOWN: And Mark Meadows?

PAT CIPOLLONE: Yes.

At this point in the videotape, Representative Liz Cheney took over the questioning:

LIZ CHENEY: When you talk about others on the staff thinking more should be done or thinking that the President needed to tell people to go home, who—who would you put in that category?

PAT CIPOLLONE: Well, I—I would put in Pat Philbin, Eric Herschmann, overall Mark Meadows, Ivanka, once Jared got there, Jared, General Kellogg. I'm probably missing some, but those are—Kayleigh I think was—was there, but I don't—Dan Scavino.

LIZ CHENEY: And who on the staff did not want people to leave the Capitol?

PAT CIPOLLONE: On the staff?

LIZ CHENEY: In the White House, how about?

PAT CIPOLLONE: I don't—I can't think of anybody, you know, on that day who didn't want people to get out of the—the Capitol once the—you know, particularly once the violence started, no. I mean—

After some hemming and hawing, Cipollone suggests that only Trump himself opposed issuing another statement, although he invokes "executive privilege" to screen out any direct conversation with the president.

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There was apparently no follow-up on this response, which is not credible. Among those high-level Trump aides that Cipollone did not refer to were political counselor Stephen Miller and trade representative Peter Navarro, both outspoken supporters of the “Stop the Steal” campaign. Navarro has refused to honor a subpoena by the House committee, but Miller testified and was quite belligerent, maintaining the election had been stolen by Biden and the Democrats.

Also in the White House at the time were such aides as Kellyanne Conway, Hope Hicks, Derek Lyons and Cabinet Secretary Kristan Nevins, all of whom could have participated in discussions on Trump’s response to the attack on the Capitol. What was their position? Either the committee did not ask, or Cipollone did not know. Nonetheless, the committee presents his testimony as an exoneration of the entire White House staff, leaving Trump, as we have said, as the leader of a “one-man coup.”

Similar evasions followed, as Luria and Kinzinger made reference to such right-wing media figures as Sean Hannity, Laura Ingraham, Brian Kilmeade, and ex-White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney, whose messages to Trump urging him to call off the attack on the Capitol were made available to the committee.

Some of these messages were handed over by Mark Meadows, when he was cooperating with the committee. Others were released by the senders, for obvious self-serving reasons. Notably, however, there are no such messages from Tucker Carlson, Steve Bannon, Roger Stone, Rudy Giuliani and dozens of other media and right-wing political figures, who would have urged Trump to push ahead with the coup and not disavow the rioters.

This likely includes some members of Congress, among whom nearly a dozen inquired with the White House about possible pardons after the failure of the coup.

There is one final cover-up, so all-encompassing that the subject was not even raised at the hearing, on the principle of “the less said, the better.” What were Trump’s contacts with members of the US Supreme Court and/or their intermediaries? It is highly likely that the success of the coup would require not only the abject capitulation of the Democrats but also the intervention of the court to put a bogus stamp of “constitutionality” on whatever deal was worked out to keep Trump in the White House.

Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito is known to have received an appeal from a number of far-right politicians seeking emergency action and arguing that Pence was violating the Constitution by failing to challenge the electoral votes for Biden. Alito had the appeal in his pocket during the coup, but took no action after the coup collapsed.

His partner in ultra-right reaction, Clarence Thomas, was in close contact with the “Stop the Steal” campaign through his wife Ginni, a leading right-wing Republican activist and frequent visitor to the Trump White House. In the weeks before the coup, Ginni Thomas had sent out dozens of messages to state legislators in Arizona, promoting the bogus claims of law professor John Eastman that the legislature had the power to override the popular vote in the state and award its electors to Trump.

The House Select Committee seeks to protect the Supreme Court, along with the CIA, the Pentagon, the FBI and other critical institutions of the capitalist state, whatever evidence against Trump it is compelled by circumstance to bring to light.

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