

# What do the Democrats know about Trump's plans for dictatorship and war crimes?

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Over the past week, an extraordinary political crisis has erupted within the American state. On Tuesday, November 18, six Democratic members of Congress—Senators Mark Kelly and Elissa Slotkin, and Representatives Jason Crow, Maggie Goodlander, Chrissy Houlahan and Chris Deluzio—released a short video urging members of the US military to refuse any illegal orders that might be issued by President Trump. All six are veterans or former intelligence officers.

While a restatement of existing law, the 90-second video was clearly directed at the escalating conspiracies of the Trump administration, which, it said, “is pitting our uniformed military and intelligence community professionals against American citizens... Right now, the threats to our Constitution aren’t just coming from abroad but from right here at home.” They go on to say, “Our laws are clear. You can refuse illegal orders... You must refuse illegal orders. No one has to carry out orders that violate the law or our Constitution.”

Speaking on ABC’s “This Week,” Slotkin said, “There are such things as illegal orders. That’s why it’s in the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Going back to Nuremberg, right?” She was referring to the war crimes trials after World War II, when the claims of Nazi officers that they were “just following orders” were rejected.

These are the types of statements made in the midst of a military coup. Trump responded with fascistic fury. In posts on Truth Social, the president denounced the lawmakers as “traitors” and accused them of “seditious behavior punishable by death.” He reposted a comment calling for the hanging of the congressmembers and added: “That’s what they used to do to people that were corrupt and betrayed our Country.”

Each of the Democrats has since received hundreds of death threats. On Monday, the US Department of War revealed that it has opened an investigation into Senator Kelly of Arizona, with the aim of recalling him to active duty and court-martialing him for his involvement in the production of the video. On Tuesday, a Justice Department official told Reuters that the FBI was seeking to interview the six members of Congress.

This extraordinary confrontation between the executive and legislative branches and the obvious potential for violence demonstrate the intensity of the conflict raging within the American ruling elite. An obvious question is posed: What do

the six Democrats know about Trump’s plans for dictatorship and illegal military operations that is so alarming that they felt compelled to issue an appeal to disobey unlawful orders?

The six Democrats are not “left” talkers or in any way identified with vocal opposition to Trump’s fascist political agenda. On the contrary, all six would be classified as “mainstream” Democrats, that is, part of the right-wing political establishment, who have stressed finding “common ground” with Trump.

Five of the six moved directly from military or intelligence roles into Congress. Slotkin is a former CIA officer with tours in Iraq and senior posts in the State Department and Pentagon. Kelly, the most prominent, is a former astronaut and husband of ex-Representative Gabby Giffords. Crow, a former Army Ranger, helped lead Trump’s first impeachment. Deluzio and Houlahan served in the Navy and Air Force, and Goodlander, a former intelligence officer, is married to Biden’s national security advisor, Jake Sullivan.

There is little doubt that all six have deep, ongoing ties to the military-intelligence apparatus. If they issue a warning about illegal orders, it is because they have information that they have chosen not to share with the public.

When they decided to issue a joint video statement urging military personnel to reject illegal orders, they were acting as the voice of a section of the military-intelligence elite which is increasingly concerned that Trump’s policies, both foreign and especially domestic, threaten to discredit the military and provoke a political explosion in the working class.

In her comments on ABC’s “This Week,” Slotkin warned of looming domestic military deployments, stating, “my primary concern is the use of the US military on American shores, in our cities and in our streets... When you look at these videos coming out of places like Chicago, it makes me incredibly nervous that we’re about to see people in law enforcement, people in uniformed military get nervous, get stressed, shoot at American civilians.”

Appearing on CBS’s “Face the Nation,” Crow was asked to clarify which unlawful orders he feared Trump might issue. He replied, “Well, send troops into Chicago, send troops into polling stations, kill terrorists’ families, arrest and execute members of Congress, shoot peaceful protesters in Lafayette

Square... He has a history of doing this.”

Slotkin added that there are “legal gymnastics that are going on with these Caribbean strikes and everything related to Venezuela,” noting “the sheer size of the military build-up in and around Venezuela—I mean, you have to assume that when superpowers put that much force into an area that they’re going to use it.”

All of the Democrats, however, shied away from identifying a specific military order from Trump that they believed to be unlawful, with Slotkin even saying that no such orders had yet been given, and that her warning was preemptive. Such statements have no credibility. Trump has already violated the Posse Comitatus Act repeatedly, first by deploying troops to the US-Mexico border to halt migrants, then by sending them into US cities.

There are definite political calculations behind the silence of the Democrats as well as their focus on the responsibility of individual soldiers to refuse illegal orders. They are diverting public attention away from the fact that the Democrats have done nothing to stop Trump’s unconstitutional actions, by impeaching him and removing him from office.

Congress has not so much as held a hearing on Trump’s illegal deployment of troops in American cities. The Democrats blame the Republicans for this, since they narrowly control both houses of Congress, but if the positions were reversed, an aggressive Republican minority would effectively disrupt the functioning of a Democratic administration.

The Democrats know very well that Trump and his inner circle of fascist aides, like Stephen Miller and Vice President JD Vance, are preparing for the establishment of a presidential dictatorship. This is expressed even in the responses of Trump’s spokespersons. Press secretary Karoline Leavitt declared, “Every single order that is given to this United States military by this commander in chief, and through this chain of command through the Secretary of War, is lawful.”

Richard Nixon put it more bluntly during the Watergate crisis, which ended his presidency, saying, “If the president does it, it’s not illegal.” A half-century later, the crisis of American democracy has reached the point that this authoritarian principle has become the foundation of the US government.

There is also the matter of the timing of the video’s release to the public. The 90-second, scripted and crisply produced video was not put together overnight. The Democrats did not issue their appeal to the soldiers after Marines were mobilized and sent into Los Angeles in June, nor when Trump sent the National Guard into Washington DC in mid-August. Nor did they take action in September when Trump and Pentagon Secretary Pete Hegseth called their meeting of generals and admirals to declare a war on the “enemy within.” Why not?

One explanation is that the Democrats decided to release their video appeal in response to reports that Trump was moving rapidly to pull the plug on the collapsing Ukrainian regime of

Volodymyr Zelensky, effectively conceding defeat in the war with Russia, now in its 46th month. Trump’s “peace plan” has been widely denounced by Democrats, and even a section of the Republicans, as an unacceptable abandonment of the Ukrainian regime. Only hours later after it was released, the video from the six Democrats was made public.

The war against Russia has always been the main focus of the Democrats’ opposition to Trump. For his part, Trump is a rabid militarist with a different geostrategy. He represents that faction of the ruling elite that wants to turn its attention to shoring up the home front—both in Latin America and Canada, and even Greenland—and erecting a police-state regime within the United States itself, in preparation for war with China.

Whatever the immediate motives behind the Democrats’ release of the video, the video itself and the ferocious response it has provoked from the Trump administration expose the real and advanced state of the preparations for dictatorship in the United States.

This process is rooted, fundamentally, in the deep contradictions of American capitalism and the domination of society by a narrow financial oligarchy. The growing movement toward dictatorship is driven by the irreconcilable conflict between the social needs of the vast majority and the relentless accumulation of wealth by a parasitic elite.

Whatever alarm it may occasionally voice, the Democratic Party is incapable of mounting any real opposition to the Trump dictatorship. It has worked with Trump at every critical juncture, including in voting to end the recent government shutdown on his terms. Its primary concern is not the defense of democratic rights, but the preservation of the capitalist system—and the credibility of the military-intelligence apparatus.

The urgent task now is the mobilization of the working class as an independent political force. The defense of democratic rights is inseparable from the struggle against war, inequality, and exploitation. The fight for democracy must be bound up with the fight for socialism.



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