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Tape reveals Trump gangster methods in pursuing election coup

In an hour-long telephone conversation Saturday, leaked to the media and first made public Sunday by the *Washington Post*, President Donald Trump tried to bully the Georgia secretary of state into overturning the result of the presidential election in his state, which was won by Democrat Joe Biden.

“I just want to find 11,780 votes,” Trump told Brad Raffensperger, the Georgia official. That is one more than the margin of 11,779 votes by which Biden won the state’s 16 electoral votes. Raffensperger rejected the plea, declaring that he stood by the result of the vote, which has been recounted twice, including a hand recount of all ballots run through voting machines.

Trump threatened Raffensperger and his general counsel, Ryan Germany, with criminal prosecution for allegedly covering up acts of vote fraud in their state. He claimed that he had actually won the state by hundreds of thousands of votes, and that a defeat there was impossible. “The people of Georgia are angry, the people in the country are angry,” he declared. “And there’s nothing wrong with saying, you know, um, that you’ve recalculated.” Raffensperger responded: “Well, Mr. President, the challenge that you have is, the data you have is wrong.”



Donald Trump (AP Photo/Andrew Harnik)

Trump used the language of a Mafia gangster in referring to a female election worker in Fulton County (Atlanta), who has been demonized on right-wing social media and repeatedly

threatened after false allegations by the Trump campaign that she had triple-counted a stack of ballots from the heavily Democratic area.

After Raffensperger reiterated that there was no evidence of such actions and that Trump was mistaken, the president responded:

“So what are we going to do here folks? I only need 11,000 votes. Fellas, I need 11,000 votes. Give me a break. You know, we have that in spades already. Or we can keep it going but that’s not fair to the voters of Georgia because they’re going to see what happened and they’re going to see what happened. I mean, I’ll, I’ll take on to anybody you want with regard to [name of election worker] and her lovely daughter, a very lovely young lady, I’m sure.”

This is nothing less than a threat of physical violence against the election worker—whose name has been withheld—and her child, coming from the president of the United States, the “commander-in-chief” of a vast military and police apparatus, as well as the leader of the Republican Party, which has increasingly taken on the coloration of a fascist movement.

Who leaked the tape of the telephone conversation has not been made public. It could well have been officials on the Georgia end of the call, seeking to insure themselves against Trump putting his violent threats into practice. Equally likely, the leak could come from within the military-intelligence apparatus itself, which monitors all US telephone conversations and previously leaked Trump’s phone call to the president of Ukraine, which led to his impeachment a year ago.

Whatever its source, the tape is ample evidence—if more were needed—for the indictment and prosecution of Donald Trump for conspiracy to overthrow the US Constitution and establish a presidential dictatorship. His co-conspirators would include White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows, who participated in the call, and several Trump campaign lawyers and aides.

Joining in as accomplices are a majority of congressional Republicans in Washington. As of Sunday, at least 140 Republican members of the House of Representatives had announced they would support a challenge of electoral votes cast by several states when Congress meets in a joint session January 6 to receive and count the ballots.

A dozen Republican senators have issued statements saying they would support such a challenge as well. Under the Constitution, any challenge to the electoral votes of any state must be supported by at least one member of the House and one member of the Senate. The two houses then must meet separately and vote on the challenges. These are expected to fail, given that Democrats have a majority in the House and many Republicans in the Senate have already conceded Biden’s victory.

But it is unprecedented in American history for a sitting president to refuse to concede after a near-landslide defeat, by a margin of seven million votes, and for the majority of his party to treat the election as illegitimate and seek to overturn it.

The statements issued by Republican congressmen and senators backing Trump’s challenge to the election have openly espoused an authoritarian political perspective. The lawsuit filed by Representative Louie Gohmert of Texas, for example, declared that Vice President Pence, who will act as presiding officer at Wednesday’s joint session of Congress, has the authority to throw out a state’s electors and choose a competing slate, or discard a state’s electoral votes entirely.

The extraordinary level of tension within US ruling circles is revealed by the letter published Sunday evening, also in the *Washington Post*, by all 10 living secretaries of defense, rejecting Trump’s claims of fraud and calling on Congress to engage in the formal counting of votes Wednesday and confirm Biden’s victory in the Electoral College.

The bulk of the statement is directed to top civilian officials and military officers, warning them against any interference in the election. “Efforts to involve the US armed forces in resolving election disputes would take us into dangerous, unlawful and unconstitutional

territory,” the statement reads. “Civilian and military officials who direct or carry out such measures would be accountable, including potentially facing criminal penalties, for the grave consequences of their actions on our republic.”

These words are all the more ominous given that one of the 10 signatories, Mark Esper, was just fired by Trump in November, in part because of his opposition to Trump’s call to deploy the armed forces to suppress the mass demonstrations against police violence that erupted after the police murder of George Floyd last May 25. There have been open discussions in the White House about invoking the Insurrection Act—as Trump threatened to do last summer—to enforce a post-election coup that would maintain Trump in office.

Besides Esper, the signers include his predecessor, retired General James Mattis; Donald Rumsfeld, co-architect of the Iraq War, and his partner in crime Dick Cheney, secretary of defense under President George H. W. Bush before he became vice president for George W. Bush. Joining them were Robert Gates, William Perry, Leon Panetta, Ashton Carter, Chuck Hagel and William Cohen.

This group of war criminals of both parties, Democrats and Republicans, warns against military interference in the transfer of power because they regard Biden as a safe pair of hands for the affairs of American imperialism, and because they fear that further efforts by Trump to remain in office could provoke an unprecedented outpouring of political opposition from the American working class. This under conditions where thousands are dying every day from the coronavirus pandemic, and millions face unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

In the midst of this deepening social, economic and political crisis, the dominant sections of the ruling elite regard Biden, Vice President-elect Kamala Harris, and their cabinet nominees, drawn entirely from the corporate and national-security establishment, as a more viable means of maintaining their class rule.

For their part, the Democrats are doing everything possible to downplay the significance of Trump’s actions and propel their 78-year-old president-elect across the finish line of Inauguration Day without a complete breakdown of the US constitutional order. Even at this point, barely two weeks away, a Biden succession is not a certainty.

Trump’s actions and his demeanor in the phone call have a whiff of desperation, but the threats to democratic rights are intensifying. The president has summoned fascist supporters like the Proud Boys to come to Washington on January 6, and he has promised to join them in the streets, giving support to the efforts of his henchmen inside the Capitol as they “object” to the votes cast by the American people.

Whatever the immediate outcome, the replacement of Trump by Biden in the White House would not mark the end of the political crisis, but only the beginning of a new and more explosive chapter. Trump is not playing by the rules of conventional American politics, and the Republican Party, increasingly under his personal control, is being transformed into the instrument of an authoritarian fascist movement.

If the Trump tape confirms anything, it is that the very presence of this gangster in the White House is an indictment of the American political system, its ruling elite, and its political-media establishment.

It was the Democratic Party, through the right-wing policies of the Obama administration and the right-wing campaign of Hillary Clinton, that paved the way for Trump. It was the Democratic Party, through its right-wing anti-Russia campaign, that sought to channel all popular opposition to the Trump administration behind its reactionary foreign policy agenda. And it is the Democratic Party which is seeking to blind the American people to the dangerous implications of the current political crisis.

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