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Homegrown Fascists



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

Donald Trump's seditious incitement to insurrection on January 6 was the political equivalent of date rape. Just as a sexual abuser attempts to see how far he can force things, Trump tested the limits of how much violence he could get away with. (And how much threatened violence – who can doubt that the mob would have killed Mike Pence or Nancy Pelosi if they got their hands on them?) So Congress gave Trump the answer: it impeached him, a second time, on January 13. Now, with the benefit of post-inaugural perspective – over 20,000 National Guard troops and a massive lockdown in Washington, D.C. to prevent another violent assault – Trump's last days look even more garishly atrocious, while congress' response promises to

be inadequate. The fascist-in-chief may be gone, but the job of controlling the violent bands of rightists he unleashed looks like it will be botched.

Four days after the pandemonium at the capitol, Rep. James Clyburn told reporters that the House would wait until 100 days into a Biden administration to send impeachment to the senate. This was a lousy idea. By then, the Republicans would all be in opposition, with memories of being terrorized by a murderous mob no longer fresh. President-elect Biden apparently recognized this and asked Sen. Mitch McConnell to put an impeachment trial on a parallel track with approval of his cabinet.

This shows understanding that the crime, the ransacking of the capitol, demands an urgent response, in part because of its uniqueness. Trump's storm troopers trampled what's left of democracy in the U.S., and he incited them. It was planned, organized over social media, and the intent was to lynch Pence, as the rioters can be heard chanting on video, and presumably to manhandle or kill as much of the congressional leadership as they could capture, and also, to prevent the legitimate confirmation of Biden's electoral win. Ideally Pence would have invoked the twenty-fifth amendment. He didn't. He still cowers in Trump's long fascist shadow. But if the House dilly dallies over sending impeachment to the senate and if the senate fails to convict, congress too will be submerged in that shadow. Worse, if the justice department doesn't pursue right-wing terrorist militias and fascists embedded in police departments, that shadow will loom over the entire country.

Trump is not the only malefactor here. The 147 Republican representatives and six senators who voted to overturn Biden's legal electors deserve censure at least. Some deserve expulsion. Glock-carrying, GOP Rep. Lauren Boebert, who tweeted Pelosi's location to the mob, may be guilty of conspiring in an attempted murder of the House speaker. But she may not be alone. According to the *Washington Post* on January 14, Democrats demanded an investigation into whether Republican congressmen, allegedly including Mo Brooks, Andy Biggs and Paul Gosar, gave the rioters a reconnaissance tour of the capitol the day before the assault, on January 5. If such a tour occurred, it would amount to conspiracy to plan an insurrection. If that doesn't merit expulsion from congress, nothing does.

Clearly there was premeditation. The proof? Democratic representative and progressive "squad" member Ayanna Pressley's panic button in her office had been ripped out, as one of her terrified staffers discovered when she tried to call for help during the riot. Not just the button – the whole panel it was attached to. And then of course there were those capitol police officers, one taking selfies with the rioters, another standing aside to abet their trespass. They were only the most obvious police sympathizers with the insurrectionists. True, many police did their job and one, Brian Sicknick, was murdered for it by the mob.

So this was a homegrown, attempted fascist putsch. That is obvious to anyone with a brain. But that didn't stop the addled Russophobes in the Democratic House from announcing that they would investigate "foreign influence" on the attack on the capitol. If these

congresspeople can't recognize the frank, made-in-America fascism in front of their noses, we're sunk. They should ditch this idiotic investigation into supposed foreign influence at once and open one into the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers, the Three Percenters and the Boogaloo Bois. Again, Biden's justice department better start probing state and local police – because they are apparently riddled with rightist terrorists.

Meanwhile, other Trump crimes continue unabated and unaddressed. Roughly 400,000 American covid dead – tens if not hundreds of thousands more than would have died had Trump done his job, starting in February 2020, when the pandemic struck. Trump's criminal sanctions against Cuba, Venezuela, Syria and Iran continue killing innocent people, though there's little likelihood he'll ever be called to account for that – just as Obama, Bush and Clinton will likely never face justice for THEIR crimes overseas. Indeed we'll be lucky, and I'll be amazed, if Biden summons the courage and decency to end Trump's sanctions, any of them. There's also Trump's designation of Yemen as terrorist – exacerbating the famine and Saudi bombing campaign, making them even more deadly, indeed genocidal, by preventing food and medicine from reaching desperate inhabitants. Unfortunately, Biden's secretary of state-to-be, Anthony Blinken, has already walked back anti-war expectations, indicating that the U.S. will merely “review” Trump's terrorist designation, not immediately revoke it. And then there was Trump's federal execution killing spree in his last presidential days – all perfectly legal of course, which tells you all you need to know about U.S. criminal law.

Clearly, after his nonpareil performance January 6, Trump should never be allowed to hold office in the U.S. again. But that depends on the Senate convicting him. And whether the senate has the will is an open question. Remember, many GOP senators are squarely in a camp whose goals align pretty much with those of Benito Mussolini. They may be less concerned about Trump inciting a fascist coup than with whether they can hang onto some portion of his Cro-Magnon base.

Should Biden “reach across the aisle” to those clinging to that Neolithic base? Surely he inclines toward doing so. Just as surely, that is a mistake. He won his election with a record majority of the popular vote – seven million votes more than Trump. A big part of his job is to respond to the needs of HIS base. But he already called for “unity” and “healing,” with people who, had they won, would turn up their noses at unity and would hector us and him that “elections have consequences.” Nonetheless, with much of the 74 million Trump voters, some unity is possible: they may well appreciate Biden's economic package. But how do you unify with fascists? And there is no doubt that Trump's base includes fascists. The answer? You don't unify with fascists, you root them out, as the many Allied dead from World War II could tell you, having done it once and paid for it in blood. And this extirpation is a job mainly for the GOP to do – if it cares to.

Biden can help: his justice department already has all the tools it needs – no, we definitely don't need new anti-terrorism or hate-crime laws and especially no new anti-protest laws of

the type GOP congressmen are already introducing, targeting, of course, people who had nothing to do with the capitol insurrection, namely Black Lives Matter. Instead, the Biden justice department should designate the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and other such groups as terrorist organizations. (Canada has already thus designated the Proud Boys). Biden's expected attorney general, Merrick Garland, could crack down on the roaming rightist bands and fascist militias that swarmed out of the woodwork over the past four years, aided, abetted and encouraged by Trump. Those violent insurrectionists will not vanish with Trump's disgrace and departure. They must be dealt with. They are not part of a "healing" process. They are our own, homegrown fascists. And whether Biden likes it or not, they have zero interest in healing.

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