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Impeachment video reveals scale and intensity of Trump-incited assault on Capitol

Democratic House managers initiated the Senate trial of Donald Trump yesterday with a thirteen-minute video that reveals, to an extent not seen before, the large scale and intensity of the January 6, 2021 assault on the US Capitol, where both houses of Congress were in session.

The video will come as a shock to millions of viewers. Up until now, video footage of the event has been broadcast in bits and pieces, and often with the most violent scenes left out. The numbers of people involved in the assault, the extreme violence used by the mob as it stormed the Capitol, and the determination with which it hunted for congressmen, senators and even the vice president have never been presented to the public in so clear and concentrated a form.

Moreover, the video presentation exposed the direct link between Trump's incitement of the fascist mob and the violent assault that followed.

Senate Impeachment Trial: January 6 Video Montage

Well over 5,000 people were involved in the mob, which included a large number of military, police and members of far-right militia groups. The insurrectionists were out for blood and were prepared to murder those whom they considered hostile to Trump.

The video lays out a very clear narrative of what transpired. It begins with Trump's speech prior to the storming of the Capitol. "We will stop the steal!" Trump declares, repeating the lie that he won in a "landslide" and that the election was rigged. "You can't vote on fraud," he says. "And when you catch somebody in a fraud, you are allowed to go by very different rules."

"We fight, and we fight like hell," Trump threatens. "And if you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." He says that the plan is to march on the Capitol building and "give our Republicans—the weak ones, because the strong ones don't need any of our help—we are going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country."

Trump's remarks are interspersed with scenes of thousands of far-right militia members and Trump supporters violently charging the Capitol building, overriding the flimsy and poorly manned security around the perimeter. Individuals in the crowd can be heard yelling, "Take the building!", "Stop the Steal!" "Traitors!" "Fight for Trump!" and "USA! USA!" One individual is seen constructing a noose.

After breaching the barriers, the mob, including many individuals clad in military-style gear, break through windows, flood into the building and storm toward the separate House and Senate chambers.

Some are directing the operation, guiding people into and through the building. One declares to a member of the Capitol police, “You’re outnumbered. There’s a fucking million of us out there, and we are listening to Trump, your boss.” As they engage in a coordinated push to override internal barriers, pinning one police officer violently against a door, one of the attackers shouts out, “We need fresh patriots to the front!”

The video notes that as the insurrectionists were approaching the Senate chamber, with senators still inside, Trump sent out a tweet criticizing then-Vice President Mike Pence, who was presiding over the congressional certification of the Electoral College vote. Members of Congress are hastily evacuated amidst an armed stand-off with rioters. Outside of the Capitol building, one protester is recorded saying that what they need is “30,000 guns,” to which another replies, “Next trip.”

Two hours after the breaching of the Capitol building—by which time it had become clear that the insurrectionists had failed to capture hostages and secure control of the Capitol—Trump released a video denouncing the “fraudulent election,” while urging the “very special” insurrectionists to “go home.”

Certain points arise out of the documentary evidence of the events of January 6.

First, the video demolishes every effort to diminish the seriousness of the events of January 6. Though the video presentation was limited to a visual documentation of the assault, what is seen is an organized attempt at a coup d’état. There is no doubt that the coup was directed by the president himself, who personally gave the signal for the attack in his speech to the right-wing mob.

While the documentary—in keeping with the limited aims of the Democrats—avoids drawing any broader political conclusions, the obvious aim of the assault was to seize control of the Capitol, preempt the confirmation of Biden’s majority in the Electoral College, effectively nullify the results of the 2020 election, and create conditions for keeping Trump in power as a presidential dictator.

The date of January 6, when Congress was meeting to confirm the results of the election, was chosen by Trump and his co-conspirators as the ideal point to take action. The assault was carefully prepared over several months, utilizing the fraudulent charges of a “rigged election,” promoted by many of the senators who are currently hearing the impeachment charges.

The video presents a chilling picture of what occurred in the hours leading up to and during the assault. But the Democrats’ presentation avoided any consideration of the underlying political strategy that motivated the attack.

The question that arises from the events documented by the video is: What would have happened if the insurrectionists had succeeded in seizing control of Congress, killing lawmakers and/or taking them hostage, and shutting down the legislative branch of the government?

Apart from an exhaustive investigation of the conspiracy, this question cannot be definitively answered. But it is more than likely that Trump had prepared for—and was banking on—this outcome. If the objective had been realized, Trump would have certainly exploited the political crisis created by his own assault on the legislative branch of the government.

It is highly probable that Trump, who had retreated to the White House after inciting the assault, would have declared a state of emergency and invoked the extraordinary powers invested in the “commander in chief.” Top advisors like Michael Flynn had previously urged Trump to declare martial law to stop the transfer of power. That would have meant, in a vacuum created by the shutdown of Congress, a de facto presidential dictatorship.

The Republican Party would have united behind Trump, as it is currently doing in opposing even the constitutionality of the impeachment. Encouraged by the success in Washington, similar operations would have been organized by far-right militias in states like Michigan, Virginia and Pennsylvania. The Democrats, terrified of doing anything that would encourage popular opposition from below, would have tried to reach some agreement in the name of “unity” and “bipartisanship.”

In the impeachment proceedings, almost the entirety of the Republican Party (44 out of 50 Senators) sided Tuesday with the patently absurd arguments of Trump’s lawyers, which have absolutely no basis in law, that the trial is unconstitutional because Trump is no longer in office.

The events of January 6 must be taken as an urgent warning. The phrase, “It can’t happen here”—that is, that the US is supposedly immune from fascism and dictatorship—has been proven false. Not only can a fascistic insurrection happen, but it has happened and came very close to succeeding. And this is not the last attempt.

To the extent that the Democrats are focused on convincing their fascist “colleagues” in the Republican Party to join with them in a bipartisan vote for impeachment, they are avoiding what should be the main purpose of the proceedings: the comprehensive exposure of all critical aspects of the conspiracy, above all, who were its organizers, who participated in one or another level in its planning, and what its objectives were. The proceedings should be aimed at uncovering the facts that clear the path, whatever the outcome of the Senate vote, for the arrest and criminal prosecution of Trump and all of his co-conspirators.

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