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General Milley and America's "Reichstag moment"

"This is a Reichstag moment, the gospel of the Führer," Gen. Mark Milley, the chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the top US uniformed military commander, told his aides in the run-up to the January 6 fascist-led assault on the US Capitol building.



In this June 1, 2020 file photo, President Donald Trump departs the White House to visit outside St. John's Church, in Washington. Walking behind Trump from left are, Attorney General William Barr, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (AP Photo/Patrick Semansky, File)

The general's reference was to the 1933 Reichstag Fire, a supposed terrorist attack on the German parliament building blamed on a communist worker. It provided the pretext for Hitler's assumption of dictatorial powers, abrogating parliamentary procedures and democratic rights and unleashing a reign of terror against the working class. It was later proven that the fire was organized by the Nazi Gestapo.

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The comparison of Trump's actions in the wake of the 2020 election to the rise of Hitler is reported in a new book, *I Alone Can Fix It: Donald J. Trump's Catastrophic Final Year*, written by *Washington Post* reporters Carol Leonnig and Philip Rucker. It was no isolated remark, nor was the general engaging in hyperbole.

Milley was meeting regularly with fellow members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff representing the Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines to assess the threat of a coup and draw up contingency plans. No doubt, these sessions were also aimed at taking the political temperature of the US officer corps to determine what level of support a dictatorial power grab would enjoy in different sections of the military.

According to the book, Milley "kept having a stomach-churning feeling that some of the worrisome early stages of 20th-century fascism in Germany were replaying in 21st-century America. He saw parallels between Trump's rhetoric of election fraud and Adolf Hitler's insistence to his followers at the Nuremberg rallies that he was both a victim and their savior."

The general further described Trump's fanatical supporters in fascist militias like the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and Three Percenters as "brownshirts," telling military and security officials preparing for the state-of-siege inauguration of Joe Biden, "These are the same people we fought in World War II."

Trump issued an angry response to the revelations through his "Save America" political action committee, describing the general as a "choking dog" and stating: "Despite massive Voter Fraud and Irregularities during the 2020 Presidential Election Scam, that we are now seeing play out in very big and important States, I never threatened, or spoke about, to anyone, a coup of our Government. So ridiculous! Sorry to inform you, but an Election is my form of 'coup,' and if I was going to do a coup, one of the last people I would want to do it with is General Mark Milley."

It is impossible to exaggerate the political significance of the most senior United States military officer warning fellow generals that the American president, their commander in chief, was emulating Adolf Hitler in a plot to foment violence and chaos, invoke the Insurrection Act and seize power as a dictator.

Trump's admiration for the Führer was apparently an open secret in Washington. During a November 2018 trip to Europe, he told his stunned chief of staff, Marine Gen. John Kelly, "Hitler did a lot of good things." This discussion is reported in another new book written by the *Wall Street Journal's* senior White House reporter Michael Bender, *Frankly, We Did Win This Election*. It recounts that Trump pushed back against Kelly's protests over the remark, insisting that Hitler revived Germany's economy.

The response by the US media to the revelations concerning Milley has largely been to lionize the general as a champion of American democracy. Typical was a fawning comment in the *New York Times* describing the new book as a "bravura introduction of a new American hero, a man who has heretofore not received a great deal of attention: Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. A better title for this book might have been 'Mr. Milley Goes to Washington.'"

The book itself quotes Milley as telling his fellow officers, "They may try, but they're not going to f**king succeed. You can't do this without the military... We're the guys with the guns."

The general's message is unmistakable: without the military, failure; with it, success.

The truth is, where the "guys with the guns" would line up was by no means a sure thing. Milley himself exhibited no friction with Trump until after the infamous June 1, 2020 incident in which he marched with the president across Lafayette Square for a photo-op made possible by the violent dispersal of peaceful demonstrators. He later felt compelled to call his action a "mistake" as it became clear that Trump wanted to invoke the Insurrection Act and call the military into the streets on the pretext of crushing the nationwide George Floyd protests. Milley and other senior uniformed commanders feared that such a deployment could provoke mass resistance and lead to deep fissures within the military itself.

In the immediate aftermath of his election defeat last November, Trump executed a wholesale purge of the top civilian officials in the Pentagon, replacing them with a collection of unconditional loyalists and fascistic ideologues, from the new defense secretary, retired Special Forces colonel Chris Miller, on down.

Miller, in turn, instituted an unprecedented alteration of the military chain of command, elevating the Special Operations Command, comprised of elite killing squads like the Army Green Berets and Navy Seals, to the status of a separate branch of the military. The move, according to Miller, would have these units reporting directly to him, eliminating “bureaucratic channels.” Trump had assiduously curried favor with this section of the military, including by pardoning war criminals from within its ranks.

Moreover, according to the new book, General Milley’s intervention on January 6 was insufficient to shorten the 199 minutes that separated the desperate request by the Capitol Police for military assistance from the actual deployment of National Guard troops on the Capitol steps. The decision to send in troops was executed only after it had become clear that the insurrection had failed.

That such a military figure is now hailed as the bulwark of American democracy, the “hero” standing between the United States and fascism, is stark testimony to the advanced decomposition of democratic forms of rule at the very heart of world imperialism.

The revelations surrounding Milley have also put paid to the claims made by virtually the entire pseudo left and prominent “left” journalists that any talk of an insurrection or a coup in relation to the January 6 assault on the Capitol was an “exaggeration.” Expressing their complacent faith in the stability of American capitalism, they adopted a semi-sympathetic attitude to the fascist-led attack, while insisting that a far greater threat to democratic rights was posed by Trump being banned from Twitter and Facebook.

These elements have only provided a “left” face for the general coverup by the Democratic Party establishment, which made no attempt to alert the American public to the threat of a coup led by the Hitler-lover in the White House, fearing far more an eruption of resistance from below. They remain determined to conceal the continuing deadly serious dangers confronting the working class in the interests of “bipartisan unity” with the Republican criminals who helped orchestrate the January 6 coup attempt.

These threats arise not merely from the sociopathic brain of a Donald Trump. His elevation to the US presidency was only the most grotesque expression of the protracted rot of American democracy. Similar dangers have emerged across the planet, from the revival of fascism in Germany to the coup threats of Brazil’s fascistic President Jair

Bolsonaro. They are rooted in the profound crisis of US and world capitalism that has deepened amid a global pandemic that has claimed the lives of over 4 million. While plunging hundreds of millions more into poverty, the pandemic has accelerated a staggering growth of social inequality that is incompatible with even a semblance of democracy.

The only progressive way out of this crisis and the only answer to the threat of fascism and dictatorship lies in the building of a powerful mass movement of the working class, allied with workers throughout the world, in a common struggle for socialism. All those who recognize the urgency of building this movement should join the Socialist Equality Party.

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