

Why the Trumpists' Calls for Dictatorship Should Worry Us

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It may sound laughable, but it's no joke—the GOP leadership and the right-wing media machine are colluding with Trump's assault on democratic institutions.

By Sasha Abramsky [Twitter](#)

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Donald Trump at a 2016 rally in Colorado with Michael Flynn, who would become Trump's first national security adviser before resigning and, later, pleading guilty to a felony. After his recent pardon by Trump, Flynn has supported suspension of the Constitution and imposition of martial law. (George Frey / Getty Images)

We are less than seven weeks away from the inauguration, and I'd be lying if I said I wasn't counting down the seconds. For the last spasms of Trumpist rule are truly a sight and sound to behold. Trumpism is at this point nothing more than a blend of cultism and fascism, a violent, nihilistic howl against the pillars of American democracy unparalleled in presidential history.

Donald Trump and his acolytes know their gig is up; they can file lawsuits till they are blue in the face, but they're not going to overturn the election results in multiple states simultaneously. They have reached a fork in the road: Accept the results and move on, or attempt to flex the presidential muscle in a way that launches America into an experiment with dictatorship. They have decided, at least rhetorically, to opt for the latter. And while they almost certainly don't have the bite to match their bark, the very fact that people surrounding Trump are calling for dictatorship ought to send a chill up all Americans' spines.

Here's a sampling of some of the Trump team's doings this past week.

Trump campaign attorney Joe DiGenova said that Chris Krebs, the election security official whom Trump fired by tweet last month after he defended the integrity of the election, should be "drawn and quartered" and "taken out at dawn and shot." Stalin couldn't have said it better himself when talking about his perceived enemies in the Soviet bureaucracy.

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Former Trump campaign attorney Sidney Powell—who was dismissed last month after pushing conspiracy theories (including that the long-deceased Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez intervened to help Joe Biden) that were recognized as deranged even by the conspiracy-mongers surrounding Trump—retweeted [a call to invoke the Insurrection Act](#), suspend the meeting of the Electoral College, and set up military tribunals to deal with Trump's enemies.

The following day, former national security adviser Michael Flynn, coming off a recent presidential pardon from Trump, [urged his erstwhile boss to declare martial law](#), suspend the Constitution, and order new presidential elections under the supervision of the military.

Far-right media personalities have joined the fascist clamor. Lou Dobbs of Fox Business recently called for Trump to take unspecified "[drastic action](#)" against his enemies. The One America News Network [has also suggested that Trump should invoke the Insurrection Act](#) as a way to remain in office.

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And Trump himself—America's isolated, mad, lonely king—seems increasingly besotted by a version of his story in which he rides in as the knight in shining armor to save

America from a “rigged” electoral disaster. On Wednesday, Trump posted on Facebook a bizarre 46-minute video in which he regurgitated a myriad of conspiracy theories. He said it may be the “most important” speech he has ever given. Critics were less impressed. *The Washington Post’s Philip Rucker* interpreted the rambling speech as a call to arms and wrote that it called into question the peaceful transfer of power.

What horrifies me isn’t simply that the cranks and sycophants surrounding Trump have dived into this moral cesspit. Rather, it’s that much of the broader GOP, especially at the federal level, has remained silent in the face of this escalating assault on the democracy. It is the *reductio ad absurdum*, the inane and insane end point of four years of the GOP’s collusion with Trump’s full-frontal assault on the institutions and culture of democracy.

In such a moment, when a fanatical movement’s hold on power starts to diminish, the extremists have a tendency to eat their own. When Attorney General Barr announced that the Justice Department—hardly a bastion of anti-Trumpist sentiment in recent years—had found no evidence of election fraud, one would have expected the GOP grandees to get Trump to call it a day and concede. Instead, most GOP senators remained silent or continued to indulge Trump in his fantasies, their cowardice a blazing beacon for all to see. And, filling the vacuum left by the Senate, the conservative media and social media ecosystem turned on Barr with all the fury they could muster against a man they now saw as a turncoat. Trump himself is reportedly chomping at the bit to ax his attorney general, who until this week had been one of his most reliable and destructive foot soldiers.

When Republican officials in Georgia and Arizona, many of whom have faced a barrage of death threats in recent weeks, begged Trump to stop his attacks on the integrity of the vote count in their states before someone got killed, Trump instead ramped up those attacks and escalated the threatening nature of his tweets. Once again, the GOP Senate remained shockingly silent.

Trump’s fascist yammering, and the GOP Senate’s collaborationist behavior, isn’t just a footnote to the 2020 election campaign. Rather, it’s a prologue to what could come next. Even while Republican state officials have pushed to protect the integrity of their election systems, at a federal level their fellow party members have happily left them to the tender mercies of Trump and his army of trolls.

The GOP as an institution has entirely abandoned its commitment to the democratic process. In tolerating Trump’s dangerous nonsense and his increasingly frantic efforts to overturn the election, it has embraced the dangerous notion that any outcome that doesn’t result in its holding power in perpetuity is illegitimate. That’s a hell of a Signal—a Thousand Year Reich—kind of signal—to send the country and the world. And it’s a hell of a warning shot as to how the Grand Old Party intends to conduct itself in the months and years ahead.