

# Opinion | Former intelligence officer issues a chilling warning about the Trump insurgency

By Chauncey Devega, Salon - Commentary

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Donald Trump speaking with supporters at a "Save America" rally at Country Thunder Arizona in 2022. (Gage Skidmore/Flickr)



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To this point, the [House Jan. 6 committee hearings](#) and related investigations have decisively established that Donald Trump and his confederates, including some Republican members of Congress, were involved in a serious, nationwide conspiracy spanning from the local to the federal level aimed at nullifying the results of the 2020 presidential election and installing Trump as an autocratic ruler.

Several apparent crimes were committed as part of this coup plot, likely including seditious conspiracy, voter fraud, financial fraud, witness tampering, obstruction of Congress and perhaps even acts of terrorism

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The assault on the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, by thousands of Trump's armed followers, including right-wing paramilitaries, was a key part of the coup plot. Trump's mob was not "random" or "hapless" or "unarmed" or "uncoordinated" as too many observers in the mainstream news media and elsewhere have long insisted. Some were armed with lethal weapons including pistols and assault rifles. Their goals were clear: Keep Donald Trump in power at any cost, in defiance of the will of the American people. Their methods were obvious: Use any means necessary, up to and including lethal violence, to stop the certification of the 2020 election.

Trump and his confederates' coup plot also involved contingency plans to use the military to seize voting machines in order to "prove" non-existent voter fraud and the Big Lie.

Last week's primetime hearing focused on Trump's actions during the 187 minutes beginning at the end of his incendiary speech at the Ellipse through the siege and invasion of the Capitol, up to the time when he finally and reluctantly asked his followers to stop the attack. At any point during those 187 minutes, Trump could have told his followers to end their attack on the Capitol. Nearly all of them would have likely obeyed. He could also have ordered the military and law enforcement to bring an end to the terrorist attack. He chose not to.

This was much more than dereliction of duty or "inaction," as some have described it.

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The sum total of the facts show that Donald Trump did not order law enforcement and the military to intervene on Jan. 6 because he was allowing his attack force the time they needed to break through the defenses of the Capitol, rampage, and cause general chaos and mayhem so that he could then somehow remain in power.

It was a strategy that came very close to succeeding. The Republican-fascist movement's war on democracy is escalating. The events of Jan. 6 were not the end of that war, but the beginning of what will be a long conflict over the future of American democracy.

To discuss that larger conflict and much more, I recently spoke with Malcolm Nance, a former senior chief petty officer in the U.S. Navy, an intelligence analyst and a leading expert in counterterrorism studies. He is the author of several bestselling books including "The Plot to Hack America," "Defeating Isis" and "The Plot to Destroy Democracy." His new book is "They Want to Kill Americans: The Militias, Terrorists, and Deranged Ideology of the Trump Insurgency."

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Nance is also a counterterrorism analysis for MSNBC and is founding executive director of the New York-based think tank Terror Asymmetries Project on Strategy, Tactics and Radical Ideologies.

In this conversation, Nance warns that Donald Trump and the larger Republican-fascist movement constitute a phenomenon he calls TITUS (for "Trump Insurgency in the U.S."). In his view, TITUS will be the basis of an extended right-wing insurgency aimed at ending America's multiracial democracy. The Jan. 6 attack, he contends, was one element of a much larger strategy and in many ways a proof of concept and roadmap for the methods TITUS and the other anti-democratic forces will use in a sustained attack on America.

Nance shares detailed thoughts on the events of Jan. 6, and speculates on some of the most disturbing questions that remain unanswered about that day. He suggests right-wing paramilitaries such as the Proud Boys and Oath Keepers would have become TITUS stormtroopers. Toward the end of this conversation, Nance outlines a scenario where TITUS and its allies launch a wave of terrorist attacks across the U.S. and the country spirals into a worsening cycle of political violence or perhaps even a second civil war.

**How are you feeling? How are you making sense of this? You literally predicted the Trump insurgency, the events of Jan. 6 and this worsening democracy crisis.**

It does hurt, in a way, to be a type of Black Cassandra. Apollo cursed her with the gift of foresight, where everything she said would be true, but she would never be believed. Apparently, it doesn't matter what I say. It only really matters that I document it, say it clearly, and that hopefully the public understands the reality of the situation. That is what I do in the new book.

I saw Jan. 6 and this escalating crisis coming a very long way away. On Nov. 6, 2020, I was on "Real Time With Bill Maher," and he was preaching kumbaya: Let's all get along and come to an understanding with each other. He said, that's enough of doom and gloom. And I said, you want doom and gloom? I'll give you doom and gloom. The United States is going into an insurgency. The Trump voters are going to form an insurgency.

He caught onto it rather quickly. He said, well, you mean like Iraq or Afghanistan? I said, yes. It is a political paramilitary insurgency, where they intend to destabilize the new government until it collapses.

The contract for this book, "They Want to Kill Americans," was signed, I believe, on Dec. 16, 2020. That was three weeks before the insurrection. I had already started this book and I understood that the United States was going into a state of right-wing insurgency. The Oath Keepers, the Proud Boys, the Three Percent militia were already having meetings and conferences together to plan for an insurrection.

**Why didn't people listen? Most of the evidence was public. What do you do with the frustration, anger and other emotions? This was wholly preventable.**

There is a measure of frustration. But I'm an intelligence professional. My job is to analyze. We don't predict the future. Intelligence professionals give you a series of options from the most likely, the least likely, all the way out to the worst-case scenario.

My books are a deep analysis of threats to the fundamental fabric of America. Unfortunately, the news media processes things very late, and in some instances refuses to believe the facts and reality of the situation no matter how dire it is. In the end I just let my work speak for itself.

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**As a military intelligence professional, what did you see on Jan. 6? What was your assessment of the situation?**

What I saw back in November and December 2020 would manifest itself on Jan. 6. I was not surprised. In fact, some of the warnings that I was making in real time were being scoffed at even on Jan. 6 as the events unfolded.

For example, when I was on air with Joy Reid I was deeply concerned, because as the fighting was going on at the Capitol, I was trying to warn the public that the police and other defenders needed to be prepared for "murder cells" in that Trump crowd.

A murder cell is a professional team of people who go in for a very specific purpose, in the middle of a crowd, to do just that, murder people. They use that swath of humanity as cover, but they are organized, they move together and then get in to accomplish their mission. The crowd is the camouflage.

Then we saw the "stack" from the Oath Keepers. We saw these very organized teams of people. I don't know whether they were the murder cell, or there were teams of one or two. But I believed from the bottom of my heart that murder, rape, public humiliation and executions were going to happen on Jan. 6 at the Capitol. There were just too many people there who believed that the attack was the so-called "Storm" that the QAnon conspiracy cult believed was going to take place.

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They were going to kill people in that building. And once you start and kill one, it would be mass murder. They could have started hanging people from the windows of the Capitol and other horrors like that. What happened on Jan. 6 with the coup and attack on the Capitol was really a template for the right wing to do it correctly next time.

**How close were we to martial law on Jan. 6? That was what Michael Flynn, Sidney Powell, and other parts of Trump's coup cabal were urging him to do. What would have happened?**

I believe that we were within hours of a full-scale coup d'état in the United States on Jan. 6. The only thing that broke it was the fact that Donald Trump didn't come down to the Capitol. Now we have the evidence. Trump was going to declare himself president of the United States. He and his confederates were waiting for that crowd to neutralize everyone, the key people, at the Capitol.

Every person in the chain of succession was in that building. That's the vice president of the United States. If he got killed or incapacitated, Donald Trump would have had to appoint the vice president. The speaker of the House of Representatives was in that building. The president of the Senate pro tempore was in that building.

If you lose that chain, then you go to the senior member of the Cabinet. If that one officer had not shot Ashli Babbitt and that mob of people had broken through those doors and started beating and killing and raping and sexually humiliating members of the House of Representatives, it would have been broadcast around the world.

Mobs go to savagery very quickly. If that scenario had played out, who would have been the only real ultimate authority left in the United States? Donald Trump would have been the only non-incapacitated surviving authority in the United States, with no chain of succession. The United States government would have been Donald Trump that night.

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All you have to imagine is if part two of the coup plot had been successful and Donald Trump had gone to the Capitol to lead the protest. Trump would have been leading the murder, abuse and humiliation of the people at the Capitol.

I really do believe that Trump's intent was to go to the Capitol and march down the halls into the well of the House of Representatives and declare himself king.

**Why won't the mainstream news media types just say this plain truth?**

They see it as being something untoward and unacceptable. They don't want to say such things about Trump and his confederates and the mob because they have not been indicted for conspiracy.

The root of that reluctance is in part how Donald Trump's followers, that mob, got to the Capitol building in the first place. Roughly 40,000 protesters were there for Donald Trump. It is believed that 10,000 or more laid siege to the building and 2,000 entered the building.

The news media doesn't want to take on these subjects for the same reason that the Capitol Police, and the U.S. Park Police, and the Washington, D.C., police couldn't respond to these people until the last moment. The Trumpists were camouflaged. How? They were camouflaged with white skin. That camouflage allowed them to engage in hand to hand and other close-quarter battle with the police at the Capitol.

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The thinking was, "Well, they're white and they're middle class. They're not going to do anything bad." That was the camouflage. The whiteness of the Trump voters allowed them to attack the Capitol without any threat from anyone whatsoever. This has been revealed by the DOJ and other investigations.

**Promises were made to the Three Percenters, the Oath Keepers and Proud Boy types. The Oath Keepers have said they were going to be given pardons and made part of a federal posse force or the like by Trump. How do you assess this?**

The Trump people were going to be one of two wings of an insurgency. If Trump had won, they would become the unofficial armed enforcement wing of the Trump Party. It would not be the Republican Party anymore. It would be the Trump party. If Trump lost, his followers would become the unofficial insurgent paramilitary wing of the Trump Party. What we have now is option number two.

I was terrified of Trump winning the election. Those people would have hit the streets and there would have been convoys of his followers armed with AR-15s. They would have told the American people, you work for us now. We're the winners. You don't exist anymore. We're going to rule over 65 percent of the American public.

Trump lost. So now they have become the insurgents. They are now waging an insurgency against the people of the United States. At present it is a political insurgency. All insurgencies start in the halls of power. They just refuse to use the levers of power to

better the nation. They use the levers of power to dismantle government and use the rule of law as part of preparing for their armed paramilitaries or terrorists to destabilize the nation.

**When I write about today's Republicans, especially since Jan. 6, I describe them as "a white supremacist terrorist organization." Please intervene. Is this accurate, or not?**

I would make one change. I wouldn't use the word "terrorist" because the organization is not the terrorists. The individuals who join groups are the terrorists. Terrorism is when they choose terrorist tactics.

The Republican Party is the equivalent of the Sinn Féin to the Provisional Irish Republican Army terrorist or paramilitary forces. We're just not at the point where the Republican paramilitaries have carried out an operation, apart from Jan. 6, which was a terrorist attack. It met every characteristic of a terrorist attack — an act or threat of violence that's political in nature, designed to extract a concession or influence an audience beyond its immediate victims.

**If the same events that took place and are continuing to escalate with Trump, the Republicans, Jan. 6 and the attacks on democracy were happening in another country, what would the intelligence assessment be?**

If I were an officer at MI6, British intelligence, and I had to write an assessment, I would conclude that the United States has a political party that has become an insurgent group and is preparing for violent military and paramilitary action in an effort to destabilize the government and overthrow American democracy to establish a totalitarian dictatorship. I believe such an assessment has likely been written. One day it will become publicly known.

**What are the capabilities of the Trump insurgency movement? What does the leadership look like? What are its weapons capabilities? How would you describe the threat assessment?**

All of these disparate groups, most notably the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, by summer 2020 had merged into what I describe as TITUS. That stands for "Trump Insurgency in the U.S."

Who is the leader? Donald Trump. Who are the principal officers? His senior people. Who are the shooters on the street? Every Trump voter.

Who is the leader? Donald Trump. Who are the principal officers? The senior people that work under him. Who are the shooters on the street? Every Trump voter. Now, before the

summer of 2020, I would have said the Proud Boys, the Oath Keepers and the Boogaloo Boys. They are now a collective, but for every one of them there are five or six other people who are so-called patriots, and they are just the collective extension of Donald Trump's will. If Donald Trump were to encourage violence, they would do it.

More than half of Republicans now say that Jan. 6 and the attack on the Capitol was an act of patriotism. Attempting to overthrow the government of the United States is an act of patriotism? That is disgusting.

**Here is a scenario. I recently wrote about it for Salon. Donald Trump is indicted by the Department of Justice. In response, he goes down to his resort at Mar-a-Lago and turns it into his bunker. He tells his followers to surround him and also to descend upon Black and brown cities that are "Democrat-controlled." Trump says he's under attack by the "deep state" and they're after him. What do you think happens?**

Trumpism is moving beyond Donald Trump. Trumpism is the embrace of the conspiracy against all of them. I believe that maybe half of them, 40 million or so of his voters, would take to the streets.

I'd say an easy 10 million would come out with arms. Here's the second component of that scenario. Republican governors and state legislatures refuse to do anything about the armed Trumpists. They refuse to bring out the National Guard. They refuse to allow the National Guard to be federalized. Now you're in pre-Civil War 1860 territory.

Here is a scenario from my new book. Terrorists bomb a parade using high-technology drones that are synced together and drop mortar bombs, just like ISIS does. The president of the United States starts getting these reports. It's not one city, it's 10 cities right here in the United States. Armed men are taking over federal armories and National Guardsmen are not stopping them. The president of the United States, in a matter of moments, has to do several things. The president has to federalize state troops. The U.S. military would have to be mobilized to fight state troopers and recalcitrant National Guardsmen who refuse federal orders.

There will be a fiefdom down in Mar-a-Lago. There will be civilians with long rifles. The governor of Florida endorsing them, calling out the state National Guard to resist the president of the United States. This is not as farfetched a scenario as many would like to believe.

**What does this Trump insurgency and other violence mean for the average American? Let's say for someone in a blue state like Connecticut, who lives outside Hartford or in Fairfield County, not out in some rural Trump area. Many of those people may believe that such violence will not really impact their day-to-day lives. What would you tell them?**



such violence will not really impact their day to day lives. What would you tell them?

It will happen around you. Don't you have a town named Newtown? Imagine Newtown, where the shooters are saying they're going to carry out their insurgency in the halls of power in Connecticut. TITUS and its followers are going to target liberals and Democrats and others they see as the enemy. The insurgency is going to be a nationwide event. This isn't something that's going to happen in just a matter of moments. We could have states that will just peel off and decide they're not going to take part in federalism anymore. Given this Supreme Court, the United States could come apart again. It will take a bold president who says, no, it's not. A new Lincoln.

**Will there be no-go zones in the country? Parts of the United States where liberals, progressives, Black and brown people and others that TITUS and its forces mark as the enemy cannot go?**

There could be. We don't know. We'll find out. It's a question: Do the Trump insurgents and their followers feel that they can do this with impunity? That they can carry out any operation, any way that they want?

**What is your call to action? What do you want people to do after they read "They Want to Kill Americans"?**

There is only one way out of this. The only way out of this outcome is that the November midterms are the final referendum on whether America truly stays America and a democracy or if it becomes a fascist dictatorship. If the Democrats lose the House and the Senate, then it is all over. There may never be another free and fair election in America. If the Republicans take control, we may be teetering on the edge of an American dictatorship.

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