



IDEAS

January 6 Never Ended

An assault on Speaker Nancy Pelosi's husband offers a ghastly echo of the attack on the Capitol.

By David A. Graham



Eric Risberg / AP

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On January 6, 2021, a mob of Donald Trump supporters ransacked the U.S. Capitol. They sought to prevent Congress from certifying his loss in the presidential election, but a few of them had even scarier ideas.

Some chanted “Hang Mike Pence!” Others assaulted Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s office, where staffers had barricaded themselves in an office, searching for her: “Nancy! Nancy Pelosi!” “Where you at, Nancy?” “Where’s Nancy?” The mob ransacked the office, but she was gone, taken to nearby Fort McNair along with other leaders. The rioters were disappointed. “We broke into the Capitol. We got inside. We did our part. We were looking for Nancy to shoot her in the frickin’ brain. But we didn’t find her,” one woman said in a selfie video. The crowd was eventually dispersed, and Joe Biden became president two weeks later.

Early today, someone broke into Pelosi’s home in San Francisco, reportedly yelling, “Where is Nancy, where is Nancy?” The speaker was not home, but the intruder attacked her husband, Paul, sending him to a hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. The San Francisco police say the suspect, who is in custody, took a hammer from Paul Pelosi and attacked him with it. Officials also say he expressed extreme

right-wing views on social media. He has been charged with a number of felonies, including attempted homicide.

Preliminary details of incidents like this are not always accurate, and police accounts are sometimes unreliable. But the ghastly echo of the bloodthirsty crowd at the Capitol suggests that the victory of democracy is still uncertain. Not only was the insurrection not defeated, but January 6 never ended.

The spectacle of an armed mob assaulting the Capitol, with the encouragement of the president, on January 6, seems to have inspired a new wave of threats and political violence. Such violence is not new to American politics, having waxed and waned over time, but has lately been on an upsurge.

Not all of these attacks target Democrats or Trump opponents. A man attempted to kill Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh in June, and another attacked Representative Lee Zeldin, the GOP nominee for New York governor, in July. Some are not ideological, such as a Wisconsin judge's assassination in June that seems to have stemmed from a personal grievance. But an armed man repeatedly menaced Democratic Representative Pramila Jayapal's home in Seattle. A man was killed in August after attacking an FBI office in Cincinnati, following an FBI search of Mar-a-Lago. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez reports frequent death threats. These follow horrifying acts of political violence during the Trump administration.

Establishing motivation for vicious personal attacks is complicated. Many of these attackers are not of sound mind, and may be harnessing their own personal demons to political causes, though the same was true of some of the January 6 attackers. Politicians using violent rhetoric or encouraging violence offer them an outlet.

The riot was the most acute expression of political anger on January 6, but it was also the culmination of a months-long effort by Trump and his allies to subvert the 2020 election. This systemic threat remains very alive too. Not only are some irredentists still demanding vainly that the 2020 election be “decertified” and Trump returned to office, but scores if not hundreds of candidates who do not accept the results of the election will win office next month—some of them in positions that will give them sway over future elections.

On the evening of January 6, Pelosi and other leaders insisted that Congress return to the Capitol that night and finish the work of certifying the election. A year later, Pelosi looked back and declared, “Democracy won.” That was a comforting notion. Today, it seems clear that the battle that started on January 6 is still raging. The threats to the Constitution and to the lives of elected officials will be with us for a long time to come.
