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By Evan Blake
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Seeking to cultivate fascistic base, Trump pardons two war criminals and promotes a third

In an effort to cultivate his fascistic base in the military-intelligence apparatus, on Friday US President Donald Trump issued full pardons to two soldiers and restored the rank of a third, each of whom have been accused or convicted of war crimes. The orders appear to have been made despite opposition from within the Pentagon leadership out of concern the negative image of the US military that this action would promote domestically and abroad.



Trump speaks at Lima Army tank plant in Ohio earlier this year [Credit: The White House]

Those pardoned were former Army lieutenant Clint Lorange, who in 2013 was convicted of second-degree murder by a court-martial and has been in prison since then on a 19-year sentence, and Army Special Forces officer Maj. **Mathew L. Golsteyn**, who was charged

with premeditated murder in 2018 after publicly admitting to killing an unarmed alleged Taliban member, and had been awaiting trial.

Trump also reversed the demotion of Chief Petty Officer Edward Gallagher, a Navy SEAL who in July was acquitted of murder charges but convicted of a lesser offense and demoted. Gallagher's acquittal came as a result of his intimate ties to the Trump administration.

The pardoning of two war criminals and promotion of another, which follows Trump's full pardoning of US Army first lieutenant Michael Behenna last May, is unprecedented in American history. It marks a significant escalation of Trump's campaign to build a fascist movement in the United States, based on sections of the military, the Border Patrol, and the other police state agencies.

Trump personally called the three war criminals to inform them that they were either pardoned or promoted. In response, each soldier issued public statements thanking him, further boosting his popularity among the most far-right sections of the American population.

Gallagher took to Instagram to praise Trump, writing, "I truly believe that we are blessed as a Nation to have a Commander-in-Chief that stands up for our warfighters, and cares about how they and their families are treated."

The White House press release on the president's decision quotes Trump as saying, "when our soldiers have to fight for our country, I want to give them the confidence to fight." Similarly, Pete Hegseth, one of the hosts of Fox News show "Fox & Friends" who is closest to Trump, summarized the president's approach to the issue: "The benefit of the doubt should go to the guys pulling the trigger."

The timing of the pardons is highly significant, coming on the second day of public, televised hearings before the House Intelligence Committee, in which the Democrats are pushing for the impeachment of Trump on the basis of differences over US foreign policy. Backed into a corner and facing hostile testimony from officials still within his own administration, Trump felt the need to take a provocative action to stoke up his reactionary base.

Trump's pardoning of war criminals underscores the complete criminality of his administration, which for the past three years has waged an unending assault on immigrants, carried out war crimes abroad, and unleashed a social counterrevolution on the entire working class through tax cuts for the rich and devastating cuts to social

programs. At the same time, Trump has whipped up racist and xenophobic sentiment and run roughshod over the Constitution, as part of an effort to cultivate an authoritarian movement in the US.

Despite all this, the Democrats have circumscribed their impeachment proceedings entirely within the reactionary framework of their differences over foreign policy in relation to Ukraine and Russia. In large part, this is because the Democrats are themselves guilty of overseeing similar right-wing, anti-democratic measures under the administrations of Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, who both oversaw numerous war crimes abroad and deported millions of immigrants from the US.

The atrocities committed by each of the three soldiers that Trump has pardoned or promoted speak to the brutal character of American imperialism and the decades long campaign to offset declining global economic hegemony through brute military force. Both political parties, the Democrats and Republicans, have overseen nearly three decades of unending war and social counterrevolution. These two parties of Wall Street are responsible for creating the conditions that caused each war crime to take place.

In July 2012, Lorance took over the command of a platoon in Afghanistan as a rookie Army lieutenant. Two days later, he ordered his troops to open fire on harmless, unarmed civilians, killing two men. Lorance attempted to cover up the war crime by calling in false reports over the radio, but the troops under his command immediately exposed his lies and he was later convicted of second-degree murder and sentenced to 19 years in prison.

In 2010, Mathew Golsteyn was a captain in the Army Special Forces during Operation Moshtarak, one of the bloodiest battles of the War in Afghanistan, which killed or injured at least 100 civilians in the city of Marja. After initially receiving a reprimand but no charges, in 2018 the Army was forced to reopen the case and charge him with premeditated murder after Golsteyn admitted to the killing in a 2016 interview on Fox News.

Perhaps the most well-known, in 2018 Edward Gallagher was charged by the Navy of nine offenses committed during the Battle for Mosul in Iraq in 2017, including shooting two civilians, posing for a picture with the dead body of a captive, and obstruction of justice. Gallagher was known for being a bloodthirsty killer, at one point claiming he killed three people per day for 80 days. After receiving significant backing from lawyers and media representatives connected to the Trump administration, as well as public statements of support from Trump himself, in July Gallagher was acquitted of all charges but convicted

of willfully posing “for an unofficial picture with a human casualty.” His only punishment was a demotion in rank, which Trump reversed yesterday.

It is important to note that under the principles elaborated at the Nuremberg trials in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, it was established that the pardoning of war crimes is itself a war crime.

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