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22.12.2021

## Retired US generals warn of 2024 election coup

In an op-ed commentary posted Friday on the website of the *Washington Post*, three retired US generals warn that the 2024 presidential election could lead to a political crisis dwarfing that of 2020, and a split by the military into rival camps.

The three retired generals—Steven Anderson, Paul D. Eaton and Antonio M. Taguba—all veterans of the Iraq war and other US military conflicts around the world, declare that the approaching first anniversary of the January 6 attack on the Capitol should be the occasion for considering what could happen if the outcome of the 2024 presidential election is disputed.



Retired US Generals Paul D. Eaton, Antonio M. Taguba, Steven Anderson

They urge the Pentagon to begin preparing now to counteract "the potential for lethal chaos inside our military … we are chilled to our bones at the thought of a coup succeeding next time." The measures would include stepped-up surveillance of military units to identify potential "mutineers."

The three generals, long retired after many decades in the Army, publicly opposed the Trump administration and aligned with the pro-Democratic Party wing of the military-intelligence apparatus.

Eaton, a retired Army major general who had been in charge of training the Iraqi army in the early years of the US occupation, publicly denounced then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in 2007 and called for his resignation.

Taguba, also a retired Army major general, was forced out of the military after leading the internal investigation into the Abu Ghraib prison atrocities in 2004, and issuing a harshly critical report. Anderson is a retired brigadier general who was deputy commander for logistics in Iraq, under General David Petraeus.

The op-ed outlines "[t]he potential for a total breakdown of the chain of command along partisan lines—from the top of the chain to squad level … The idea of rogue units organizing among themselves to support the 'rightful' commander in chief cannot be dismissed.

"Imagine competing commanders in chief—a newly reelected Biden giving orders, versus Trump (or another Trumpian figure) issuing orders as the head of a shadow government. Worse, imagine politicians at the state and federal levels illegally installing a losing candidate as president."

The three generals go on to elaborate a worst-case scenario of the internal and global consequences of such a conflict erupting in a divided military.

"… with loyalties split, some might follow orders from the rightful commander in chief, while others might follow the Trumpian loser. Arms might not be secured depending on who was overseeing them. Under such a scenario, it is not outlandish to say a military breakdown could lead to civil war.

"In this context, with our military hobbled and divided, U.S. security would be crippled. Any one of our enemies could take advantage by launching an all-out assault on our assets or our allies."

Citing the failure to seriously investigate the January 6 insurrection or punish any of its leaders, they call on Congress and the Biden administration to "take steps to prepare for the worst."

They conclude, "the Defense Department should war-game the next potential post-election insurrection or coup attempt to identify weak spots. It must then conduct a top-down debrief of its findings and begin putting in place safeguards to prevent breakdowns not just in the military, but also in any agency that works hand in hand with the military."

Only two days before the generals' commentary, Reuters published a lengthy profile of the group of military officers, retired and in the reserves, who worked with retired general Michael Flynn to devise plans for Trump to overturn the outcome of the 2020 elections.

These included Colonel Phil Waldron, who worked for Flynn in the Defense Intelligence Agency, specializing in psychological warfare; Lieutenant Colonel Ivan Raiklin, a former Special Forces officer in Afghanistan; and Captain Seth Keshel, a former Army intelligence officer.

Waldron developed the conception that the 2020 election was rigged using methods he was familiar with from his work in the DIA, a psychological warfare operation by foreign adversaries. This contention became the basis of various outlandish claims about election results being routed through servers in Germany, or altered by Italian satellites, and changed by software built in Venezuela or otherwise manipulated by China.

Raiklin, according to Reuters, was "a leading promoter of the 'Pence card' theory—in which Vice President Mike Pence purportedly could have blocked the January 6 certification by Congress of Biden's victory."

Captain Keshel "claimed to have developed statistical models that prove the 2020 election results were fraudulent … Keshel in August released an analysis which he claimed showed Trump won seven states that went to Biden. Trump embraced the claim …"

According to Reuters, the efforts of the former officers not only triggered renewed calls for audits in all the battleground states, they also provoked threats of violence against election officials, both Republican and Democrat, who defended the election as fairly conducted and the results as accurate.

It has already been widely reported that Waldron helped draft the PowerPoint presentation, titled, "Election Fraud, Foreign Interference & Options for 6 JAN," which was delivered to White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows and briefed to selected Republican congressmen on January 5. Among the slides were recommendations that included, "Declare National Security Emergency" and "Declare electronic voting in all states invalid."

But the Reuters report provides further confirmation of the active role played by former military officers—who clearly had continuing contacts within the Pentagon—in the organization and political incitement of the January 6 coup.

The *Washington Post* published a further column on the likelihood of the outbreak of civil war in the United States, by one of its regular op-ed writers, Dana Millbank, who usually adopts a posture of mocking humor and unseriousness.

In Sunday's column, however, Millbank interviewed a political science professor at UC San Diego, and adviser to the CIA on political instability, Barbara F. Walter, who employs the CIA's own methodology for assessing civil conflict and applies it to the United States. Her conclusion, "We are closer to civil war than any of us would like to believe."

Millbank gives an excerpt from Walter's forthcoming book, to be published in January, titled, *How Civil Wars Start* .

"No one wants to believe that their beloved democracy is in decline, or headed toward war," she writes. But, "if you were an analyst in a foreign country looking at events in America—the same way you'd look at events in Ukraine or the Ivory Coast or Venezuela—you would go down a checklist, assessing each of the conditions that make civil war likely. And what you would find is that the United States, a democracy founded more than two centuries ago, has entered very dangerous territory."

The United States is on the verge of "open insurgency" which would lead to "sustained violence as increasingly active extremists launch attacks that involve terrorism and guerrilla warfare, including assassinations and ambushes," the CIA adviser writes, according to Millbank.

Such scenarios are not just the nightmare of one trio of retired generals, or one CIA adviser. Rather, these commentaries are given space in the leading newspaper in the US capital to articulate what is being widely discussed within leading circles in the US ruling elite: that January 6, 2021, far from being a one-off event, is a warning of an impending eruption of violent conflict, in 2024 if not sooner.

World Socialist 21.12.2021