

The US political crisis and the decay of American democracy

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With the appointment of former FBI Director Robert Mueller Wednesday as special counsel to investigate alleged ties between the Trump presidential campaign and Russian officials, the factional battle raging in Washington, pitting different factions of the state and ruling class against each other, has entered a new stage.

The appointment of Mueller came just eight days after Trump unexpectedly fired FBI Director James Comey. Over the following week, the media reported the existence of a memo written by Comey reporting that Trump encouraged him to stop an investigation into former National Security Adviser Michael Flynn. Another media “exposé” alleged that Trump shared classified material with Russian officials at a recent White House meeting.

The crisis further intensified Thursday, when, at a closed-door congressional hearing, Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein said the investigation over Trump’s alleged ties with Russia was now being treated as a criminal, rather than a “counterintelligence” issue, according to a statement by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham.

The intelligence agencies and military are playing the leading role in the conflict with Trump, and it is precisely these forces to which the Democrats, including the liberal apologists for US imperialism, are appealing.

The orientation of the Democrats was articulated in a column Thursday by the *New York Times*’ Nicholas Kristof, who, like the *Times* as a whole, serves as a conduit for discussions within the intelligence agencies. Entitled “Dangerous Times for Trump and the Nation,” the column hails the Justice Department’s appointment of Mueller and warns that “the Trump presidency may now be disintegrating, tumbling toward entropy.”

Kristof notes approvingly that during the 1974 Watergate crisis, President Richard Nixon’s defense

secretary, James Schlesinger, ordered the military not to obey orders from the White House unless he signed off on them. Schlesinger also, in the words of Kristof, “prepared secret plans to deploy troops in Washington in the event of problems with the presidential succession.”

Kristof concludes, “This was unconstitutional. And wise.” He declares that similar “unconstitutional” acts of insubordination by military officials may be justified in the present crisis. “We don’t know how Trump will respond in the coming months, and let’s all hope for smooth sailing. But as with Schlesinger’s steps, it’s wise to be prepared,” he writes.

Kristof refers to the former generals that Trump has assembled in his cabinet—Secretary of Defense James Mattis, National Security Adviser H. R. McMaster and Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly—along with the former oil tycoon and current Secretary of State Rex Tillerson—as “grown-ups” who need to provide the White House with “adult supervision.”

He concludes that members of this cabal should be “keeping one another’s cellphone numbers handy in case an emergency meeting becomes necessary for our nation.”

Kristof’s column is only one in a series of articles penned in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and other newspapers contemplating some sort of palace coup to replace Trump, including potentially invoking the 25th amendment to the US Constitution. Envisioned as a means to create an orderly succession in case the president became extremely ill or rendered unconscious, the amendment may be invoked by two thirds of the cabinet if they determine that the president is “unable to discharge the powers and duties of his office.”

On May 16, *Times* columnist Ross Douthat wrote that Trump is a “child,” arguing that a “child...cannot really

commit” impeachable offenses, leaving a solution involving the 25th amendment. In March, the *Times*’ Thomas Friedman floated the proposal of a palace coup by military members of the cabinet in a column under the headline, “Calling on a Few Good Men.”

As the political crisis develops, it becomes all the more clear that there is not an iota of democratic or progressive content to the Democrats’ opposition to the Trump administration. What is unfolding is a bitter struggle between different reactionary factions of the ruling class, with both expressing a deeply authoritarian and undemocratic orientation.

The Trump administration represents the transfer into the White House of the gangster methods that characterize the corporate and financial elite. His antagonists are not seeking to mobilize mass working-class opposition to Trump, but rather to preempt, prevent and divert this opposition behind a pro-war campaign led by powerful factions of the military, CIA and FBI.

Their campaign against Trump is being waged on the pretense that the president was somehow bribed or coerced by the Kremlin to take a more accommodative role towards Russia. Media figures, intelligence officials and Democratic politicians are using these concocted claims to brand all domestic political opposition as the product of anti-American subversion by a foreign power.

In this arch-reactionary worldview, the potential removal of a president with the assistance of or directly by the military is seen as simply part of the day-to-day operations of the “deep state.”

Any government that would emerge from the removal of Trump on such a basis would be deeply reactionary, pledged to a policy of aggression against Russia, and set on a collision course with the working class.

The columns by Kristof and Friedman express something much deeper than the views of two particularly right-wing individuals. There is a growing desire by sections of the US political establishment to bring the forms of political rule more directly in line with the oligarchic character of American society.

At the time of the theft of the 2000 elections, the WSWS noted that the absence of any serious opposition to a constitutional coup carried out by five members of the Supreme Court to stop the recounting

of ballots made clear that there does not exist a significant constituency for democratic rights in the ruling class. Matters have far advanced over the past 17 years. Trump is one manifestation of a deeper disease. His opponents within the ruling class are another.

In the crisis gripping Washington, the social force that has yet to be heard from is the working class. It must intervene in the crisis on the basis of its own socialist program and perspective.

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