

In run-up to November election, US Army brass voices concern over “civil-military environment”

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With calls from Republican candidate and ex-president Donald Trump for the domestic deployment of the Army against both migrants and antiwar protesters and appeals by Democrats for top Pentagon officials to pledge they will disobey unconstitutional orders from the White House, the US military is being drawn into the maelstrom of the November elections in an unprecedented fashion.

That this is provoking deep concern within the American high command finds explicit expression in a report issued late last month by the US Army. Titled “2024 Annual Estimate of the Strategic Security Environment”, the document deals with US preparations for wars and interventions from Europe to Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

While warning of China’s “growing power, ambitions, and assertiveness” in the US Indo-Pacific Command’s area of operations, along with “troubling signs of stronger resilience and faster-than-expected reconstitution” of the Russian military in Ukraine’s US-NATO-backed war, the most worried segment of the strategy document deals with the status of the US military within the United States itself.

The US “civil-military environment is one of the most challenging the military has seen since the advent of the all-volunteer force in 1973,” the document, drafted by the US Army War College’s Strategic Studies Institute, reads. “Public confidence in the military has been steadily declining, the US Army is facing a years long recruiting crisis, and the trust between senior military and political leaders has been eroding for over a decade.”

Indeed, while the American military retains an approval rating higher than the abysmal levels to which those for the US Congress, the media and major capitalist politicians have sunk, it has nonetheless plummeted at an alarming rate, reaching its lowest level in over a quarter of a century. This has been driven to no small measure by the debacles suffered in the US wars of aggression in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The report attributes the waning popularity of the military and its increasing alienation from civilian society in part to the steep decline in the share of the American population with direct contact to the 1.3 million-strong active duty armed forces.

When the draft was ended and an “all-volunteer force” was created in face of surging popular opposition to the Vietnam War in 1973, “more than 20 percent of American adults had previously served in the military,” according to the report. By contrast, “only 6 percent of people today call themselves veterans, and only 15–20 percent of Americans report knowing someone who has served in the military.”

Moreover, dwindling recruitment has increasingly been drawn disproportionately from a few southern states and from rural and small-town America. The increasing disconnect between the military and the vast majority of the US population risks the “emergence of a warrior caste”, the report warns. That this “caste” is riven by a yawning divide between rank-and-file soldiers drawn from more impoverished sections of country and a top echelon of generals who retire to make millions by joining the boards of major arms corporations is nowhere suggested by the Army’s study.

“Declining civilian connections to the military may jeopardize civilian control in the United States,” the Army report warns. It adds:

Evidence shows some veterans and service members see themselves as having superior values to the rest of American society and see themselves as superior in love of country and honor. If such service members do not respect the values or beliefs of the people they are supposed to put their lives on the line to defend, the democratic ethos is in jeopardy.

Finally, in a gross understatement, the report concludes that it is “strategically vital” to understand that “North America faces political unrest ... The hardening of ideological positions in the United States has led to deep political and cultural divides that the election will likely not heal, presenting a danger as significant as any external threat.”

Far from “healing” any divide, the current election has seen Trump predicting a “bloodbath” if he is not returned to the Oval Office, and Biden warning in his speech to the Democratic National Convention, “Anybody else said that in the past, you’d think he was crazy, you’d think it was an exaggeration, but he means it.”

The involvement of the US military, or elements of it, in a coup attempt to resolve a disputed election result in November is a real and present danger. In this regard, the siege of the US Capitol on January 6, 2021 must be seen not as an aberration, but rather as prologue to 2024.

Retired military officers, who unquestionably maintained close ties to senior active duty commanders, played a key role in organizing and politically inciting the January 6 coup. Moreover, top civilian Pentagon officials appointed by Trump and senior uniformed commanders worked to block the deployment of National Guard troops to the Capitol, even as its police force was being assaulted and

overrun by thousands of demonstrators and organized paramilitary squads deployed by the Proud Boys, Oath Keepers and other fascist militia.

Among the generals who deliberately slow-rolled any troop deployment, giving these fascist elements time to pursue their goal of seizing the Capitol and taking hostage members of the House and Senate, was Gen. Charles Flynn, who initially lied about being on a call with the head of the Washington, DC National Guard in which troops were held back. Far from punishing Flynn, whose brother Gen. Michael Flynn (ret.) was one of the most vociferous proponents of the “stolen election” lie and of the January 6 coup itself, the Pentagon has promoted him to the prestigious position of commander of Army forces in the Indo-Pacific Command, while continuing to cover up his role in the Capitol coup attempt.

As for the concerns expressed in the report about the “escalating politicization of the military” and a beleaguered “democratic ethos”, these are belied by the patently political and anti-democratic calculations expressed throughout the document relating to US military’s operations across the globe. Nowhere is this more true than in Latin America, where the US Army has over a century-long record of participating in invasions, interventions and coups to overthrow governments deemed insufficiently subservient to US imperialist interests and install military dictatorships in their place.

In addition to warning against China, which has supplanted the US as the principal trading partner of most countries in Latin America and which the report accuses of “building and operating dual-use port, digital, and space infrastructures it could use against the United States during times of war,” the report dwells at some length upon purely domestic political developments within the countries in what it describes as the “United States Southern Command Area of Operations”.

Thus, it warns that “groups both in and out of power, particularly on the left, are weaponizing discontent, leveraging social media tools to destabilize, take power, and consolidate control ...”

In addition to the Maduro government in Venezuela and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, it indicts “the Libre government in Honduras, the Gustavo Petro government in Colombia, and the Luis Arce government in Bolivia” for raising “concerns about antidemocratic behaviors and divergence from the United States in criminal and security cooperation and other policies.” It likewise cites the Workers Party government of President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil for adopting “regional and global policies in the spirit of an independent foreign policy that are detrimental to the United States”, while accusing the Morena “regime of Andrés Manuel López Obrador” in Mexico of having “a troublingly mixed record of cooperation with the United States ...”

No doubt in each of these offending countries the US military is continuously reworking plans for direct military intervention in pursuit of regime change. In countries like Colombia and Brazil, the US Southern Command is pursuing close ties with its military counterparts independent of government-to-government relations with the aim of preparing direct collaboration in the preparation of military coups when they are deemed necessary.

The report specifically hails Argentina’s new fascist President Javier Milei for having come “to power with a strongly pro-market agenda and a notably pro–United States/China-skeptical orientation,” adding that the success or failure of his far-right government “will send important signals to the rest of the region regarding the reliability of the United States as a partner and the benefits of pursuing the path

of market economies, transparency, and Western-style democracy.”

A US military apparatus that celebrates the rise of the most extreme right-wing elements in Latin America while denigrating and seeking to undermine even the most tame elements of the Latin American bourgeoisie’s waning “Pink Tide” can hardly be described as “apolitical”. How could it not be applying such calculations within the US itself?

“On War,” the treatise on military strategy written by the early 19th century Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz is mandatory reading at the US military service academies and advanced training schools. Its most famous statement is that “war is the continuation of policy with other means”.

In the case of the US military, with its vast global footprint and its gargantuan \$886 billion budget, accounting for nearly 56 percent of total US discretionary spending, this aphorism may well be stood on its head, with intervention in domestic politics becoming the pursuit of war by other means.

The two major capitalist parties have set the stage for such an intervention, both through their massive buildup of the American military apparatus and their pursuit of militarism and war internationally. In the case of the Republicans, Trump has encouraged the direct use of US military force in the US itself, while hatching coup plots from within the Pentagon. For their part, the Democrats have appealed to the same military brass to serve as the ultimate arbiters of the US Constitution.

The very real threat of a military coup and dictatorship in the US, like the growing drive toward World War III, can be successfully countered only through the mobilization of the working class in opposition to the corporate and financial oligarchy. This requires a complete political break with the Democratic Party and an irreconcilable struggle against both major parties and the capitalist profit system they defend. In the meantime, no one should take their eyes off of the machinations within the Pentagon.



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