

Opinion

# Appeasement Got Us Where We Are

It's time to stand up to the fascists among us.



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Supporters of President Trump in the Capitol Rotunda on Wednesday. Credit...Saul Loeb/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

So, is it finally OK to use the F-word?

One shouldn't use the term "fascist" lightly. It isn't a catchall for "people you disagree with." It isn't even a synonym for "bad political actors." Mitch McConnell's brand of politics has, in my view, greatly damaged America; but cynical legislative maneuvers aren't the same thing as threatening and encouraging violence, and I wouldn't call McConnell a fascist.

Donald Trump, however, is indeed a fascist — an authoritarian willing to use violence to achieve his racial nationalist goals. So are many of his supporters. If you had any doubts about that, Wednesday's attack on Congress should have ended them.

And if history teaches us one lesson about dealing with fascists, it is the futility of appeasement. Giving in to fascists doesn't pacify them, it just encourages them to go further.

So why have so many public figures — who should have known what Trump and his movement were — tried, again and again, to placate them by giving in to their demands? Why are they still doing it even now?

Consider a few milestones on the way to the sacking of the Capitol.

One big step happened in February, when [every Republican senator](#) other than Mitt Romney voted against convicting the president on impeachment charges despite clear evidence of his guilt. Susan Collins famously justified her

vote by hoping that Trump had “[learned his lesson](#).” What he actually learned was that he could abuse his power with impunity.

Another big step came in the spring, when armed protesters, with Trump’s encouragement, [menaced Michigan authorities](#) over Covid-19 restrictions. That dress rehearsal for this week’s violence drew some tut-tutting from Republican politicians, but no serious pushback. Indeed, one of the leaders in these events, [Meshawn Maddock](#) — who was also involved in Wednesday’s rioting — is [in line](#) to become co-chair of the Michigan G.O.P.

Again, the lesson was clear: Right-wing activists can get away with threatening elected officials, even when this includes brandishing weapons in public spaces.

Then came Trump’s unprecedented refusal to accept electoral defeat. Many Republicans joined him in trying to reject the will of the voters — almost [two-thirds](#) of House Republicans voted against accepting Pennsylvania’s electors *after* the Trumpist riot.

But even those who didn’t actively join his attempts to stage a coup tried to let Trump and his followers down easy. McConnell waited [more than a month](#) before accepting Joe Biden as president-elect. [One senior Republican](#) said to The Washington Post, “What is the downside for humoring him for this little bit of time?” Well, now we know the answer.

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Finally, what happened on Wednesday? A Trumpist attack during the confirmation of Biden’s victory was completely predictable. So why was security so lax? Why were there hardly any arrests?

What we know suggests that the people who were in charge of protecting Congress failed to do so because they didn’t want to be seen treating the MAGA mob as the danger it was. The Wall Street Journal reported that Defense Department officials worried about the [optics](#) of having military personnel on the steps of the Capitol — something that didn’t concern them during the far less threatening [Black Lives Matter](#) protests last year. But The Associated Press reported that Defense Department officials say Capitol Police turned down offers of help.

And once again the attempt to appease fascists will surely end up encouraging them. So far, the lesson for Trumpist extremists is that they can engage in violent attacks on the core institutions of American democracy, and face hardly any consequences. Clearly, they view their exploits as a triumph, and will be eager to do more.

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For this isn't over. If you aren't terrified about what Trump might do between now and Inauguration Day, you haven't been paying attention. And I can't be the only person worried about what will happen during the inauguration itself.

After the failure to protect Congress, how can we be sure there will be adequate security during the presidential transition? Not long ago such concerns might have seemed paranoid, but now they seem utterly reasonable.

And even if the inauguration goes off smoothly, the threat will remain. If you imagine that the people who stormed the Capitol will just go away once Biden is installed in the White House, you're delusional.

So what can be done? It's time to stop appeasing the fascists among us. Law enforcement should seek to arrest as many of the participants in Wednesday's attack as possible — some have already been identified, and there's video evidence that should make it easy to identify many more.

And anyone who tries to violently interfere with the transfer of power should also be arrested.

Finally, there needs to be an accounting for whatever crimes took place during the past four years — and does anyone doubt that Trump allies and associates engaged in criminal acts? Don't say that we should look forward, not back; accountability for past actions will be crucial if we want the future to be better.

Appeasement is what got us to where we are. It has to stop, now.

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