



## Joe's Dilemma

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Dear Mr President

You won the Presidency by promising to return the country to the path of sBIDEensiblism. Adding Kamala Harris to your ticket, and your own mature years, cleverly signalled the passing of the baton to a new generation. Enough Americans voted for 'One-term Joe' to start to heal the wounds of their deeply divided democracy. The semi-colon Biden Presidency was the right answer at the right time.

Then everything changed a fortnight ago. The true scale and ambition of America's far-right extremists became breathtakingly clear on live television for the whole world to see. The Battle of the Storming of the Capitol will be committed to the pages of history.

Thanks to your calm and timely words, most Americans have been aghast at the attempted insurrection. Subsequent revelations have confirmed our worst suspicions. It is hard to minimise a coordinated plot to take senior Democratic politicians hostage and assassinate high profile figures among them.

Significant numbers of Republican leaders are now peeling away from Donald Trump. Their earlier uneasiness was thwarted by their desire to hitch onto his electoral coat-tails, and as you will know, many have lived under the daily stress of being dragged to the front of the crowd by a deeply vindictive President.

Meanwhile, a new and unexpected agenda item faces your freshly minted administration: a radicalised home-grown anti-government movement, encouraged and enabled by the Republican Party, and sustained by social media and conspiracy theories.

This seditionist mob, who were able to storm the Capitol, occupy Congress and come close to capturing and harming the people's elected representatives, in what was the most important security failure in the United States since 9/11. What should you do?

The answer, based on experience elsewhere, is to come down hard and fast on this movement, starting with those who so publicly identified themselves in their attack Congress a week ago.

Already, the FBI and other agencies of the US government tasked with domestic security are doing exactly that, making dozens of arrests with more in the pipeline.

More broadly, you know that the true state of America's militarised right cannot be ignored any longer. This is not a matter for the GOP alone. It is now a major (domestic) national security threat that, as the new President, you have inherited and must manage carefully.

You are under pressure to de-radicalise the right. Your instincts may point the other way, expecting Republicans attend to the problem. Given that they have done a very poor job so far, it now falls to you on national security grounds alone.

Some will counsel caution, advising against further inflaming a volatile situation by making martyrs of mob. Unfortunately, this approach risks also allowing violent extremists to retreat, regroup and possibly return.

Given this, the best way to guard against what is needed now is for the Leviathan that is the national security establishment of the United States to do what it is so ably equipped to do - to find, detain and prosecute these threats just as hard as they would a domestic branch of al Qaeda.

The formidable powers protection US security need to be reoriented towards domestic threats. In the coming months, investigators will comb through ringleaders, malcontents and others and undoubtedly arrive at a fairly lengthy list to be prosecuted.

Those investigations will uncover America's extensive and varied far-right. Some are made up of clichéd stereotypes: armed and fortified angry men running militias as a way of life, often holed up in the hills.

Other are harder to categorise, including a large and growing number of 'self-radicalised' citizens, who live in a closed-circuit of self-reinforcing internet delusions, mistrust the mainstream media, and are driven by the grievance politics in which the former President specialised.

As America's new President, you naturally want to bridge this alarming social divide. You understand that you must address the real and present danger of angry, armed and motivated individuals who will seek to attack again. But you have to decide how far to go in trying to reduce tacit support for right-wing extremism.

Helpfully, the seditionist tendencies of conspiracies like the idiotic but pervasive QAnon have now been exposed. Big tech has belatedly moved to treat such movements as they would terrorist groups. The right-wing media, finally shocked into action, are backpedalling hard. Both are driven by self-interest, sniffing the wind and the likelihood of legal prosecution of those who aided and abetted the mob.

While by temperament you are cautious, the extremists have become embedded and emboldened by your predecessor. As a result, the best way to ensure peace is to go hard now against the seditionist mob, round them up and prosecute them.

That will inflict some short-term pain for longer term security, as it will both remove some ringleaders from public life and more importantly show to the followers that actions like these have consequences. Given the overt identity of most of the mob that stormed the Capitol, would also be a powerful refutation of the argument that racism pervades American security.

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