

Liberal Expert to LA Times: Military Coup Possible Under a President Trump

Earlier this week, a liberal “expert” on military and foreign policy wrote an op-ed for *The Los Angeles Times* in which he suggested the U.S. military would rebel against an authoritarian President Donald Trump, resulting in a coup like what Turkey experienced last week.

“Try to imagine, then, a situation in which Trump commanded our military to do something stupid, illegal or irrational,” wrote James Kirchick, a fellow with the Foreign Policy Initiative. “Something so dangerous that it put the lives of Americans and the security of the country at stake. (Trump’s former rival for the Republican presidential nomination, Marco Rubio, said the United States could not trust “the nuclear codes” to an “erratic individual.”) Faced with opposition from his military brass, Trump would perhaps reconsider and back down. But what if he didn’t?

“In that case, our military men and women, who swear to uphold the Constitution and a civilian chain of command, would be forced to choose between obeying the law and serving the wishes of someone who has explicitly expressed his utter lack of respect for it.”

But a military coup? While it’s certainly not impossible, the republican—small “r”—form of government in the United States makes such an event nearly so.

The higher ranks of the U.S. military take a quasi-religious view on the sanctity of its civilian leadership. It’s engrained into officers when they first join, and it’s passed down to the enlisted ranks, as well.

Additionally, the Posse Comitatus Act expressly prohibits the military from being directed against the civilian population. That creates a direct conflict within Kirchick's own argument in which he quotes Air Force Gen. Michael Hayden (ret.), who served as head of the CIA and the National Security Agency under President George W. Bush.

"You are required not to follow an unlawful order," Hayden added. "That would be in violation of all the international laws of armed conflict."

Not only does that apply to orders from Trump, or any civilian leader, but also to orders that may come from the military chain of command.