



Atlanta. News. Now.

OPINION | Jan 23, 2021

## Resilience, courage needed to plot way forward

By Charles Shapiro

There's a useful phrase in Spanish that we lack in English: "*auto golpe*". Literally it means *self-coup*. An *auto golpe* occurs when a president instigates an attack by the military or by mobs against the legislature. The purpose is to extend the president's term in office.

What occurred on January 6 was an *auto golpe*. A huge crowd of people went to Washington to protest Congress certifying the electoral vote. A smaller group of radical extremists, egged on by lies and demagoguery, invaded the Capitol to stop the formal tally of the Electoral College vote. Make no mistake. This was not an attack against a building, but against the Congress of the United States. It was an attack instigated by the Chief Executive against a co-equal branch of the United States government. The goal was to overturn the results of the November 3 election and to take away the votes cast by my fellow Georgians. That some members of Congress promoted the Big Lie of widespread electoral fraud is astounding.

I am furious about the mayhem in the Capitol: people in tactical gear intending to hang the Vice President of the United States and bind members of Congress with zip ties; others beating Capitol police officers with flagpoles while chanting "USA, USA" as if it were the Olympics. And their targets were not just our elected representatives. The Confederate flags waving inside the rotunda signaled loud and clear that, to these invaders, Black lives do not matter, while their t-shirts emblazoned with "6MWE" (Six Million Weren't Enough) and "Camp Auschwitz" represent an obscene glorification of the Holocaust. This rabble and their actions are appalling to all of us and antithetical to the values of American democracy.

When I asked Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to speak to the World Affairs Council in July, I had no idea that he would become a national hero five months later by defending the rule of law against inordinate pressure from U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham and President Trump. He was a bit wonky last summer talking about voting machines and procedures. I told a friend afterwards that Raffensperger is "the straightest of straight shooters." Thank goodness. And thank goodness for Gov. Brian Kemp, who supported Raffensperger at considerable political risk.

As a 34-year career diplomat, sworn to defend the Constitution against all enemies foreign and domestic, it pains me that Georgia's Secretary of State demonstrated more political courage than the U.S. Secretary of State, who said not one word about the *auto golpe*. Raffensperger is a statesman in the truest sense of the word. In contrast, Secretary Pompeo spent his last week in office setting political traps for his successor.

The next few months will be precarious. In World Affairs Council programs about COVID-19, speakers invariably stressed that companies must be resilient. It never occurred to me that we would need democratic resilience after a mob attack on our democracy.

The task we face now is to ensure that January 6 was the high-water mark of these *golpistas* -- domestic terrorists and insurrectionists. The World Affairs Council will do our part to promote global, democratic and inclusive analysis by providing experts to cut through distortion and outright lies. As poet Amanda Gorman challenged us at the Inauguration, we must be brave enough to be it.

---

*Charles Shapiro is the president of the [World Affairs Council of Atlanta](#) and a former U.S. Ambassador to Venezuela.*