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USA

Trump's Test Case: Deploying the Military to Washington, DC

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IN A LONG rant of over 70 minutes at an August 10 news conference, Trump claimed that the nation's capital, Washington, D.C., "has been overtaken by violent gangs and bloodthirsty criminals, roving mobs of wild youth, drugged-out maniacs, and homeless people. And we are not going to take it anymore."

Everyone knows that when he singles out "wild youth" he means Black youth. By "high crimes areas" he means the Black community.

Trump then ordered an extraordinary exertion of federal power over an American city with the deployment of National Guard troops to the capital. He put the city police under federal control, and deployed 500 federal law enforcement officials, including 120 FBI agents, 50 deputy U.S. marshals, as well as agents from the Drug Enforcement Agency and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives.

Some will be on patrol duty and others will be visible in "high crime" or high traffic areas. The first night they picked up 23 residents, on that Saturday night they arrested 68.

Since under federal law, this action can only last 30 days without Congress's approval, Trump boasted that if Congress doesn't extend it, he will declare a national emergency.

Trump described the deployment as part of a broader effort to "liberate" the city and make it "great again." In fact, he claims he will remake the city "beautiful" again.

Unsurprisingly, he promised to send troops to other cities, specifically mentioning Chicago, New York, Baltimore and Oakland, California. All of these cities have elected Black mayors and large African American communities.

Washington, DC, once known as "Chocolate City," has been run by Black politicians for decades. With a population of 290,772, African Americans are the largest racial group, standing at 43%, about four percent more than the city's white population. (Another 15% are people of color from a variety of ethnicities.)

The DC Mayor, Muriel Bowser, and other local officials hadn't been told about the takeover; they heard and watched it announced on television.

Speaking during a live town hall on social media, Mayor Bowser urged community members to "protect our city, to protect our autonomy, to protect our home rule and get to the other side of this guy and make sure we elect a Democratic House so that we have a backstop to this authoritarian push."

"We are not 700,000 scumbags and punks," she added. "We don't have neighborhoods that should be bulldozed. We must be clear about our story, who we are and what we want for our city."

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi plowed ahead and installed Drug Enforcement Administrator Terry Cole as the "emergency police commissioner." The city sued. District Court Judge Ana Reyes ordered the parties — which included Trump, Bondi and the Department of Justice — to work out a plan with DC officials. Subsequently the Trump administration rescinded Bondi's directive.

Need for Self-Rule

This is the first time a president has ever used Section 740 of the Home Rule Act — DC is not a state — to federalize the metro police,” said Dr. Heidi Bonner, chair of the Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology at East Carolina University.

Although DC residents elect their own politicians and raise their own money, Congress still has power over the city's policies, which it frequently uses. (The people of DC have a nonvoting representative in the House and no voice in the Senate.)

The D.C. situation is unique because the city — lacking statehood — is uniquely vulnerable to federal intervention. But it provides Trump with a test case on the road toward authoritarianism. And Democratic mayors across the country have warned Trump against expanding his law-and-order power grab.

Brandon Johnson, Chicago's mayor said in a statement, “Sending in the national guard would only serve to destabilize our city and undermine our public safety efforts.”

Brandon Scott, the mayor of Baltimore, shot back, “When it comes to public safety in Baltimore, he should turn off the rightwing propaganda and look at the facts. Baltimore is the safest it's been in over 50 years.”

Barbara Lee, the former longtime African American Congresswoman and newly elected mayor of Oakland, wrote on X: “President Trump's characterization of Oakland is wrong and based in fear mongering in an attempt to score cheap political points.”

Stephen Miller, an influential White House deputy chief of staff, a well-known white supremacist, stepped up the rhetoric on April 11, tweeting without evidence: “Crime stats in big blue cities are fake. The real rates of crime, chaos & dysfunction are higher orders of magnitude. Everyone who lives in these areas knows this. They program their entire lives around it. Democrats are trying to unravel civilization. President Trump will save it.”

What Next

Critics call Trump's move a “brazen power grab,” especially since there is no emergency. In fact, D.C. crime is declining.

Trump maintains the executive branch has the right to do as the president pleases because of national security concerns and attacks judges who rule against him.

Previously Trump deployed the California National Guard in Los Angeles over the objection of the governor. Governor Newsom has challenged the order, arguing it violated both the Tenth Amendment and federal law. The Posse Comitatus Act, adopted in 1878, restricts military involvement in civilian law enforcement. A San Francisco Federal court is now hearing the case.

This growing pattern of federal override could permanently reshape the balance of powers between the executive, legislative and judicial branches. It also sets a dangerous precedent for federal control of local law enforcement.

The reality is that Trump is a white supremacist racist and nationalist. He seeks a return to a White Republic where Blacks and other oppressed national minorities and women are subordinate. That's his meaning of Make America

Great Again.

The DC takeover, like Trump's attack on gerrymandering and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) is aimed at wiping out the representation of Blacks and other racial minorities as citizens and residents of the country. When he says the country must go back to 1776, when Indians were slaughtered and Blacks were slaves, he means there should be no positive mention of them in schools, universities, or museums.

Grassroot Organizing

In Los Angeles after Trump sent in the National Guard, community groups led by immigrant rights activists, started to organize a fightback and continue to do so.

They are using varied tactics including confronting masked ICE immigration cops and their buddies, videoing them and having lawyers help immigrants who are disappeared. They are not relying on the Democratic Party establishment or elected officials.

African Americans understand how to do this better than any other segment of the population. It took a mass civil rights movement years of protests to win the right to vote.

The Los Angeles model shows us the way. Organized nonviolent mass protest, including use of civil disobedience, must be planned.

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