

Obama administration moves to bolster police in Baltimore

Jerry White
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The Obama administration is stepping up its efforts to contain social tensions in Baltimore and shore up the credibility of the police department that has been the target of a wave of protests following the killing of Freddie Gray.

On Tuesday, Obama's new attorney general, Loretta Lynch, arrived in the city as thousands of National Guard troops, state and local police prepared to end a nearly two-week occupation. The state of emergency, which saw military units patrolling the streets in armored vehicles and hundreds of arrests, was not lifted until the day after she left.

Shortly after being sworn in as attorney general, Lynch denounced Baltimore youth for "senseless violence" after anger erupted April 27 over repeated police provocations and crushing poverty. These comments echoed those of Baltimore Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake and President Obama, who both slandered the young people as "thugs" and "criminals." The FBI—overseen by Lynch's Department of Justice—sent at least two spy planes to help coordinate the police-military suppression of protests in the days following.

After a brief visit with the Gray family and their lawyer, Lynch held five hours of closed-door meetings with the mayor, the police chief and "clergy leaders and activists who frequently protest alleged police brutality and excessive force," according to the *Baltimore Sun*.

Lynch spent a half hour visiting Police Chief Anthony Batts at the police headquarters and then met with cops who were on duty when clashes with city residents began. The cops stood at attention as she entered the room. Lynch declared: "Thanks to all of you. I'm looking at the hardest-working police officers in America."

She continued to praise the department, known for its murderous "rough rides," beatings and shootings. "You have picked a noble profession, you have picked a hard profession, but you have picked one of the best

professions out there today, because you have picked the one that lets you go out there every day and say 'I'm going to help somebody'."

She wrapped up by saying, "I have watched the police of this city and I know there are difficulties. I know we have struggles, and we are here to help you work through those struggles in a way that will be the best and most productive way for this department. But to all of you who are on the front lines, I just want to say thank you."

Lynch's comments underscore the central role of the White House in response to the rampage of police violence in the United States: defend the police, ensure that they continue to be armed with billions of dollars in military weaponry, while making the barest pretense of "reform" in response to the most egregious crimes.

For weeks, state and local Democrats, clergymen and other figures associated with the largely African American political establishment in the city have implored the White House to make some gesture, including perhaps a presidential trip to the city 40 miles from Washington, DC, to assure residents that the federal government would intervene to "reform" the police and "rebuild trust."

While eschewing any visit that might suggest even in the slightest hostility to the police, the Obama administration has intervened aggressively. First the White House supported the deployment of 3,000 National Guard troops to the city on April 27, according to Maryland Governor Larry Hogan. After this failed to suppress protests and solidarity marches spread throughout the country, the Department of Justice worked closely with state attorney Marilyn Mosby, who decided to file charges against the six cops involved in the murder of Freddie Gray.

With growing opposition by the police union to the indictments, threats of an outright mutiny by police and discussions of moving the venue of any potential trial of

the cops out of the city, there is trepidation among sections of the political establishment that the exoneration of the cops would only provoke another upheaval.

The entire political establishment in Baltimore has relied on police brutality to contain hostility against the pro-corporate measures that have enriched a small elite—including a large number of African American entrepreneurs—while attacking workers and youth, particularly in the city’s poorest neighborhoods. On April 1, the city started turning off water to 150 households a day as part of a plan to shut off 25,000 households behind on their bills. The city has raised water rates by 42 percent over a three-year period as part of a move to privatize the city’s water system and further gentrify certain areas.

On Wednesday, Mayor Rawlings-Blake called on the US Justice Department to investigate the police department for patterns of civil rights violations, including excessive force, discriminatory harassment and unlawful stops, searches or arrests. “We all know that Baltimore continues to have a fractured relationship between the police and the community,” Rawlings-Blake said. “I’m willing to do what it takes to reform my department.”

Rawlings-Blake is well informed about the character of the Baltimore cops, since her administration has paid out more than \$5 million in police brutality cases. She handpicked the police chief in 2012 and has repeatedly claimed her measures to “reform” the police have curbed excessive violence and false arrests.

The mayor initially opposed earlier calls for a civil rights investigation, opting for the Justice Department to conduct a “collaborative review” with the police. Well aware of the popular suspicion of her administration, she is turning to the federal government for political cover.

Discussing Lynch’s visit, US Representative Elijah E. Cummings told the *Baltimore Sun* that it was “a transformative moment” in changing the culture of policing across the nation. Senator Barbara A. Mikulski told the *Sun* that her group discussed “requiring police to receive training in community relations.” The Justice Department, Mikulski said, “has the power of the purse to begin to restore the trust between the community and the Police Department.” On Thursday Lynch told a Senate subcommittee that she would decide “in a matter of days” whether to open a full-scale civil rights investigation.

This is all intended to serve the larger aim of doing absolutely nothing. A similar probe into the Ferguson, Missouri police department revealed a pattern of civil rights violations, but no one has been held accountable.

Similar investigations have been carried out in other cities, often revealing egregious crimes while proposing no measure to do anything about them.

In fact, for all of its pretensions about defending civil rights, the Obama Justice Department has repeatedly intervened in court cases to protect the police. At the same time, the White House has provided millions of dollars to arm local police departments with weaponry used in Afghanistan, Iraq and other countries invaded by the United States.

The Obama administration, which has made trillions available to Wall Street speculators and the Pentagon war machine, has not proposed any measures to ameliorate the social catastrophe facing workers and youth in Baltimore and cities across the United States.

On Monday, Obama hosted an event at Lehman College in the Bronx, New York to supposedly address the lack of opportunities for young minority men. After again condemning the “criminals and thugs” in Baltimore, he promoted his “My Brother’s Keeper” initiative, which encourages executives and celebrities to become “role models” and provide more profit opportunities for minority businessmen.

The initiative has raised \$80 million from companies like American Express, Deloitte, Discovery Communications and News Corp and is led by top executives from PepsiCo, News Corp., Sprint, BET and Prudential Group Insurance. The alliance’s advisory group will include former Secretary of State Colin L. Powell; former Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr.; the former basketball star Shaquille O’Neal; and the mayors of Indianapolis, Sacramento and Philadelphia—all cities plagued by poverty and police violence.



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