

Pentagon activates military units to defend Washington

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An elite US military unit that is best known for providing color guards, fife-and-drum corps and 21-gun salutes for presidential inaugurations and funerals has been placed under “operational command” for far more sinister purposes. These include the defense of the US government against “foreign or domestic” enemies and the potential evacuation of top officials in the event that Washington, DC slips out of the government’s control.

A report by journalist William Arkin published in *Newsweek* magazine Thursday reveals that the Joint Task Force National Capital Region (JTF-NCR) was activated last month amid the intensifying crisis generated by the criminality and neglect of the US government in the face of the most widespread and deadly outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic anywhere on the planet.

The *Newsweek* article follows Arkin’s reports last month that standby orders had been issued in early March to activate contingency plans “not just to protect Washington but also to prepare for the possibility of some form of martial law.” He cited an internal military contingency plan known as CONPLAN 3502 (Civil Disturbances Operations) providing for domestic military deployments to suppress “riots, acts of violence, insurrections, unlawful obstructions or assemblages, group acts of violence, and disorders prejudicial to public law and order.”

Newsweek reported that “now, planners are looking at a military response to urban violence as people seek protection and fight over food and, according to one senior officer, in the contingency of the complete evacuation of Washington.”

Noting that the Pentagon dismissed these reports, insisting that National Guard troops were under the command of governors and that federal troops were operating under the direction of FEMA, Arkin writes:

“And yet the activation of Joint Task Force National Capital Region, including almost 10,000 uniformed personnel to carry out its special orders, contradicts those assurances. JTF-NCR is not only real and operating, reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense for some of its missions, but some of its units are already on 24/7 alert, specially sequestered on military bases and kept out of coronavirus support duties to ensure their readiness.”

Arkin reports on the deployment of two Blackhawk helicopter companies of the Illinois National Guard to Fort Belvoir, a US Army installation in Virginia near Washington. He points out that, unlike other guard units activated during the coronavirus crisis, these companies are not under the control of the state’s governor, but rather under “strict federal duty as if they were to be shipped to Afghanistan or Iraq. Except that in this case, the battlefield is in Washington, DC.”

The helicopter units have been mobilized in conjunction with the Joint Emergency Evacuation Plan (JEEP), which calls for evacuating the Pentagon’s command out of the Washington area, and the Atlas plan, which provides for the evacuation of civilian executive, legislative and judicial leaders to ensure “Enduring Constitutional Government.”

Washington, as with other areas of the country, is under a state of emergency imposed by its mayor, Muriel Bowser. As yet, it has not faced the full brunt of the pandemic. According to official figures, the number of coronavirus cases in the city stood Friday at 2,476, and the number of deaths at 86. It could still face a major surge of the disease. But as to an evacuation to maintain continuity of government, where would the president, his cabinet, the Congress and the Supreme Court go that they would not be taking the virus with them?

Among the military forces that are on alert for mobilization to the US capital are, according to *Newsweek*, “quick reaction infantry units from the 82nd Airborne Division at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, and the 101st Airborne Division from Ft. Campbell, Kentucky—units that would normally be rushed to the Middle East in some crisis.”

In addition, according to the report, special operations troops, “the so-called National Mission Force”, have been sequestered in “operational facilities” in Washington, divided into separate units to avoid one group from infecting the other.

These preparations are not being made to combat the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed, according to official figures, some 37,000 Americans.

Rather, they are part of the preparations of the US ruling establishment and its political representatives to confront rising social anger and resistance as tens of millions have lost their jobs, and the corporations and the government are preparing to force millions to return to work under conditions in which their health and lives, along with those of their families, will not be protected.

As many millions of American workers have been left without jobs and incomes, forced to line up for food donations and deprived of adequate medical care, the financial oligarchy has gorged on itself on the trillions of dollars lavished upon it by the US government. The vast social chasm separating these two poles has become so naked that an explosion of class struggle is inevitable.

This is why the plans for a military defense of the US capital and even an evacuation of the government are being dusted off and put into operation.



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