

Would-be führer Trump steps up coup plotting

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Donald Trump is stepping up his efforts to manufacture a pretext for a declaration of martial law and the deployment of the military on the streets of the United States. The president has taken a series of provocative actions even as more information is coming to light as to just how close Trump came to instigating a military bloodbath at the beginning of last week.

Only hours after the last National Guard troops were withdrawn from Washington DC, Trump made a new threat of military violence against a major American city, this time Seattle. In statements on Twitter Wednesday night, Trump demanded that Washington Governor Jay Inslee and Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan, both Democrats, act to suppress protesters in a small neighborhood from which the police have temporarily withdrawn. “If you don’t do it, I will,” he tweeted. “This is not a game.”

Trump was seizing on a series of minor protest actions in the city, in which demonstrators against police violence have declared a “Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone,” encompassing all of six city blocks, with spray-painted signs, campsites and other paraphernalia reminiscent of the 2011 Occupy Wall Street protests. This reality has not stopped Trump from portraying the events in the most incendiary terms. “Domestic Terrorists have taken over Seattle, run by Radical Left Democrats, of course,” he tweeted later, adding, “LAW & ORDER!”

Trump also announced Thursday that he will hold his first public campaign rally since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in Tulsa, Oklahoma on June 19. This is extraordinarily provocative, given the ongoing mass protests against the murder of George Floyd. June 19 has been traditionally celebrated by African Americans as “Juneteenth,” the day the Emancipation Proclamation was finally put into effect in Texas in 1865, while Tulsa is the site of the worst racist violence against African Americans in history, the Greenwood massacre of 1921, in which as many as 300 were killed.

The choice of this date and place for a campaign rally must be seen as a deliberate effort to stage a confrontation between pro-Trump and anti-Trump forces that would “justify” the use of the military.

The unprecedented political crisis in America was underscored by the comments made Wednesday night by Trump’s Democratic opponent in the presidential election, Joe Biden, on the Comedy Central program hosted by Trevor Noah. “This president is going to try to steal this election,” Biden declared. In response to a question by Noah about whether he expected Trump to refuse to leave office if he is defeated on November 3, the former vice president said that was “my greatest fear.”

Biden then praised the public attacks on Trump by a series of former military leaders last week, after Trump’s threat to call out the military against those protesting the police murder of George Floyd. “I was so damn proud. You have four chiefs of staff coming out and ripping the skin off of Trump,” he said, adding that he counted on the military to remove Trump if he balked at respecting the results of the vote. “I promise you, I’m absolutely convinced they will escort him from the White House in a—with great dispatch,” Biden concluded.

This statement is remarkable: first, because Biden concedes that Trump has no intention of accepting the outcome of the election, and second, because he concedes to the military the decisive role in Trump’s ultimate removal from office. As to what Biden would do if the military did not remove Trump, but rather allowed him to stay, Noah did not ask and Biden did not say.

Press reports have shed additional light on the events of June 1 and the days that followed, completely confirming the warnings made by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the Socialist Equality Party that Trump was seeking to launch a military coup. On Monday, June 1, he declared himself “your president of law and order” and threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807, under which the

president may deploy troops in the event that local and state governments cannot keep order.

At a meeting that Monday morning, Trump demanded that federal troops pour into Washington, where he had been badly frightened by protests outside the White House. According to an account in Thursday's *New York Times*, "Gen. Mark A. Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, objected, saying it was a terrible idea to have combat troops trained to fight foreign adversaries at war with Americans. A wild scramble ensued to use another option: Summon National Guard troops from other states to reinforce the 1,200 DC Guard troops already called up."

Eleven states contributed 3,900 National Guard troops, including not only nearby Maryland and New Jersey, but more distant states like South Carolina, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, Missouri and even Utah and Idaho. Ten of the eleven states have Republican governors. At the Pentagon's insistence, the National Guard troops stacked their weapons and ammunition at a local armory and went on patrols unarmed in order to avoid a repetition of the Kent State massacre 50 years ago, when National Guard troops opened fire on antiwar student protesters, killing four.

It is clear, however, that Trump wanted such a violent encounter and sought to trigger a confrontation that night, which would give him a pretext for further and far more sweeping military moves. Press reports indicate that the order by Secretary of Defense Mark Esper that National Guard forces should operate without weapons at the ready was not cleared with the White House.

At the same time, according to the *Times*, General Milley and Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy "warned the Guard throughout the day that if it could not control the protests, Mr. Trump would most likely call in the 82nd Airborne." These troops, as well as military police from the 10th Mountain Division stationed in upstate New York, were brought to the Washington DC area, but remained at bases outside the city.

Despite the absence of any significant violence in the US capital, it was not until Thursday night, June 4, that Trump agreed that the regular troops should be sent home. On Sunday, June 7, he allowed the National Guard troops from outside DC to return to their states. This pullback, only completed Wednesday, has not ended the threat of military intervention.

On Wednesday, Secretary Esper and General Milley replied by letter to the demand of the House Armed Services Committee that they appear to testify about the

planned use of the military against the mass protests over the death of George Floyd. The two have so far declined to testify, adhering to unconstitutional instructions from the White House barring any cooperation with the Democratic-controlled House of Representatives.

In their letter, Esper and Milley said that active-duty military forces "were not ever in the District for purposes of civilian law enforcement." But they declared that Trump retained the authority to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 and send federal troops anywhere in the United States to suppress disturbances. "In the event that a president makes such a decision, he may do so without approval from the state government in which the forces are to be used," they said. This would apply directly to the state of Washington, the current target of Trump's threats.

As a statement of the SEP warned, "The conspirators in the White House have not ceased their plotting. The military is biding its time and considering its options. The police remain armed to the teeth."

As Biden's comments make clear, the Democrats consider the military the ultimate arbiter of politics in the United States.

Neither Congress nor the Democratic Party lifted a finger against this presidential declaration of authoritarian rule. It was only because of opposition from the Pentagon brass, which felt such a military action was both poorly prepared and *not yet* necessary, that Trump pulled back.

The responsibility to oppose Trump's preparations for dictatorship falls to the working class, the only social force whose very existence is bound up with the defense of democratic rights—as the ongoing mass protests against police killings demonstrate. This must go forward through the building of an independent political movement of the working class based on a socialist program.



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