

Trump's police-state attack in Portland, Oregon

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The Trump administration is carrying out an extraordinary intervention in the city of Portland, Oregon, targeting demonstrators protesting against police killings for violent assault and what amounts to kidnapping by federal agents. Armed thugs of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) and other federal agencies have fired on crowds with CS tear gas, rubber bullets and sonic weapons that can do permanent physical damage. At least one protester has been severely injured by an “impact munition” fired by a federal marshal.

Federal agents have driven up to groups of protesters, grabbed people and bundled them into unmarked vans, hauling them off to undisclosed locations for interrogation. Many of these agents have worn generic camouflage rather than uniforms which normally identify their names or agencies. One protester, who was seized by men in military fatigues and patches on their clothing saying only “police,” said he did not know whether they were actually police or ultraright extremists working with the police. “It feels like fascism,” he said.

Portland is intended as a test case of the type of methods that Trump pledged to carry out on June 1, when he threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 against the mass protests over the police murder of George Floyd, and ordered thousands of federal agents and National Guard troops into the streets of Washington, D.C.

The relatively small-scale protests in a few blocks of downtown Portland do not represent any significant threat to life or property, consisting mainly of spray-painting graffiti, setting off fireworks and defying local police orders to disperse. A few hundred people have gathered regularly each night for the past seven weeks to call for defunding local police and demand other

reforms of the notoriously violent and repressive Portland Police Bureau.

Trump deliberately seized on these protests, in a city and state controlled by the Democratic Party, in order to test out methods of brutal repression. Last week, he urged acting Secretary of Homeland Security Chad Wolf to intervene in Portland. Wolf visited the city on July 16 to oversee the provocative attacks and made statements denouncing “violent anarchists,” accusing local officials of “fostering an environment that continues to breed this type of lawlessness.”

Federal agents were deployed to two federal buildings in the downtown area that are adjacent to the local courthouse, where the nightly protests have been focused. The spearhead of the federal attack is BORTAC, the SWAT-style force deployed by Customs and Border Protection, even though Portland is 400 miles from the nearest US border. Besides BORTAC, forces were provided by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Transportation Security Administration, the US Marshal's Service, the Coast Guard, and the Federal Protective Service, which guards federal buildings.

The American Civil Liberties Union has filed suit in Oregon against the DHS and the Marshal's Service for “indiscriminately using tear gas, rubber bullets and acoustic weapons.” An ACLU spokesman said, “Usually when we see people in unmarked cars forcibly grab someone off the street, we call it kidnapping. The actions of the militarized federal officers are flat-out unconstitutional and will not go unanswered.”

The federal forces are not only violating the constitutional rights of local protesters, they are effectively usurping the authority of both local and state governments. Two senators and two congressmen from Oregon issued a letter calling the federal

intervention “unacceptable under our Constitution,” saying that “snatching people off the street with no apparent reason” was an action “more reflective of tactics of a government led by a dictator ...”

Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum has filed a lawsuit, seeking a temporary restraining order against further arrests, while Governor Kate Brown called for the withdrawal of all federal forces from Portland. The city’s mayor, Ted Wheeler, said Sunday, “Their presence here is actually leading to more violence and more vandalism. And it’s not helping the situation at all. They’re not wanted here.”

As is clear from Wheeler’s comments, the Democrats’ main fear is that the intervention by the federal agents could blow up a situation which they would prefer to handle with local police repression. Wheeler, a multimillionaire, was being denounced as “Tear Gas Ted” until the federal officers were sent in to supplant the Portland cops as the main agents of repression in the city.

According to federal district court Judge Marco Hernández, commenting on a suit brought by one protest organization, there was “evidence that officers have violated the constitutional rights of peaceful protesters,” and that at least one protester, who was complying with Portland Police Bureau orders, was nonetheless “subjected to rubber bullets, tear gas, and a flash-bang at close range.”

Trump aims to use the Portland situation as a template for similar actions in other cities. An internal Department of Homeland Security memorandum obtained by the *New York Times* cites the need to prepare for “future encounters with protesters (and federal agents) in other cities.”

Both Trump and one of his top advisers, anti-immigrant fanatic Stephen Miller, made statements last week threatening federal intervention against an alleged breakdown of law and order in a number of Democratic-controlled cities, including Chicago, New York and Los Angeles, the three largest in the country. In a typically grandiose lie, Trump told Fox News Sunday that “we could lose Portland” if he did not move ahead with the federal intervention.

It is no accident that Trump has chosen CBP and BORTAC as the pointmen for his assault. His call in June for military intervention against protesters failed, not because of opposition by the Democrats—there was

none—but because the Pentagon felt such an action was both politically unprepared and unduly risky, posing the danger of a massive political backlash against the military.

But in the CBP, Trump has an agency with an openly fascistic “culture,” as demonstrated by reports of internal Facebook groups where thousands of CBP officers exchange racist and antidemocratic messages. Last week CBP had to fire four employees and suspend dozens of others for participating in these groups, mainly one called “I’m 10–15,” a code for “aliens in custody,” which had 9,000 members, including top officials.

Trump has repeatedly sought to appeal for support among the police, local, state and federal, on the basis of racism, antiimmigrant chauvinism, and anticommunism. Last fall he traveled to Minneapolis to hold a rally where local cops turned out in force, and he delivered an antisocialist diatribe against what he called the “radical left.” Eight months later, Minneapolis cop Derek Chauvin put Trump’s precepts into practice, murdering George Floyd with a knee on his neck.

With his administration in deepening political crisis, brought on by its gross negligence and willful malpractice in the coronavirus pandemic, the sudden increase in unemployment to Depression levels, and mass protests against police violence that followed the murder of George Floyd, Trump is increasingly driven to resort to the most desperate and antidemocratic measures.

In his interview with Fox News Sunday, Trump again refused to say whether he would accept the results of the November 3 election, with polls showing a collapse in support both for the Republican Party and for himself personally. The resort to brutal force in Portland is a warning of the methods which Trump is preparing to maintain his grip on power and to strike back at his main enemy: the American working class.



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