

# Trump holds closed-door meeting with Special Forces troops

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President Donald Trump held a closed-door meeting Thursday with Special Forces troops at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. The meeting, given the bland label “Troop Engagement” on the official White House schedule, was a private session with the assassination squad that carried out the killing of Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi in 2019.

The purported agenda of the visit to Ft. Bragg was for Trump and his wife Melania to present a Unit Citation to the group and visit a Special Forces memorial on the grounds of the huge base. But it is highly unlikely that Trump would devote precious time, five days before an election in which he is trailing in the polls, to a purely ceremonial event.

The importance Trump attached to the meeting is indicated by the fact that it was carried out despite dangerous weather conditions that forced his campaign to cancel an outdoor rally in nearby Fayetteville, scheduled for two hours later. The area was hit by wind gusts of up to 50 miles per hour from the weather system that once was Hurricane Zeta.

No further details of who Trump met and what discussions were held have been made available. But Ft. Bragg is a massive military installation that includes both the US Special Forces Operation Command, headquarters for the most highly trained killers in the US military, and the 82nd Airborne Division, one of the most important rapid deployment forces of the US Army.

Any effort by Trump to defy the results of the election would certainly generate mass protests throughout the United States. Trump could well have used the Ft. Bragg visit to discuss potential armed responses to such a political explosion, and to assess the level of his support within the military units stationed there, and among their commanders.

When Trump made his initial attempt at a presidential coup d’état June 1, when he threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act against the mass protests provoked by the police murder of George Floyd, he summoned troops from two locations—Ft. Bragg and Ft. Drum, New York—to the Washington D.C. area. While these forces never actually entered the capital, they were stationed nearby for nearly a week.

Trump traveled to North Carolina from the Tampa, Florida area—the site of another key military headquarters, the US Central Command, which controls all US military activities in the Middle East and Central Asia, including the war in Afghanistan, naval and air operations directed against Iran, air and ground operations in Iraq and Syria, and drone missile warfare in Yemen.

In Tampa, Trump addressed a campaign rally where he delivered his usual incoherent and delusional rants, vilifying the Democratic Party and its presidential candidate Joe Biden, and threatening China with retaliation for the coronavirus—his supporters began chanting “Make them pay.”

But Trump’s main target was socialism, which he presented as an imminent threat. “Tuesday, your vote is going to save our country,” he told the crowd. “This is the most important election we have ever had. We are going to defeat the Marxists, the socialists, the rioters, the flag burners, the left-wing extremists. We are going to defeat the anarchists.”

As usual at Trump’s rallies, his supporters were crowded together and largely unmasked. There is a steady trickle of reports of people infected and sick with coronavirus after attending Trump campaign rallies, which have been held in some of the hardest-hit states, such as Wisconsin, Nebraska and Iowa. Trump is holding a series of such “superspreader events,” as

Dr. Anthony Fauci called them last week, in Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and back to North Carolina in the days leading up to the election.

The *Financial Times* reported Thursday that there was a direct empirical correlation between the growth of coronavirus infections and Trump's worsening standing in the polls. The newspaper said its analysis showed that in battleground states where COVID-19 cases had risen by more than 7 percent in the past week, Trump trailed by an average of 4.3 percentage points. In states where COVID-19 cases had risen by 6 percent or less, he trailed by just 1.4 percentage points.

The Trump campaign received two legal setbacks Wednesday, as the US Supreme Court declined to intervene in Pennsylvania and North Carolina against state court rulings that election officials could extend the period for accepting mail ballots, so long as the ballots had been postmarked by November 3.

In North Carolina, the court by a 5-3 margin let stand a state court ruling that allowed the state Board of Elections—which is controlled by the Democratic governor—to extend acceptance of mail ballots from November 6 to November 12. The November 6 date had been set by the Republican-controlled state legislature.

In Pennsylvania, the court unanimously denied an appeal by Republicans that it stop the state government from accepting mail ballots received November 4-6, but postmarked November 3 or earlier. The court did not make a final ruling on whether such ballots could be counted, and three members—Samuel Alito, Clarence Thomas and Neil Gorsuch—said they might support suppression of such ballots, but that it was too late to issue such an order before Election Day.

These were the same three justices who were in the minority in the North Carolina decision.

The rulings in both cases differed from the court's decision on a similar Wisconsin case, where by 5-3 the justices overturned a federal district court order extending the deadline for accepting mail ballots. The two justices who shifted their positions, Brett Kavanaugh and John Roberts, reportedly cited the fact that in North Carolina and Pennsylvania it was state courts rather than federal courts who had made the decision, and that state courts were entitled to some latitude in interpreting state election laws.

It was notable that the three justices appointed by

Trump took three different positions on the appeals. Gorsuch sided with the Republicans, Kavanaugh, at least in this instance, with the Democrats, while newly confirmed justice Amy Coney Barrett did not participate in the ruling, saying she had not had time to review the relevant legal documents.



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