

In meeting with Bukele, Trump bars return of Abrego Garcia, threatens deportation of US citizens

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The gathering of fascists at the White House Monday to welcome El Salvador's President Nayib Bukele marked another step in the consolidation of a presidential dictatorship in the United States. Trump hailed Bukele as a kindred spirit—someone who agreed to accept unlimited numbers of people from the US and imprison them in one of the most brutal detention facilities on the planet, the notorious CECOT mega-prison.

Bukele, ruling as a dictator and suppressing all political opposition, repaid the favor by acknowledging Trump as overlord and paymaster. He rejected outright the possibility of releasing Kilmar Abrego Garcia, a wrongfully deported Salvadoran immigrant with an American wife and three children in Maryland. To return him to the United States, Bukele claimed, would be “preposterous,” and he “had no power” to do so.

From Trump's inner circle came a mixture of fascistic threats and outright lies. Attorney General Pam Bondi falsely claimed that two courts had found Abrego Garcia to be an MS-13 gang member and an illegal alien. In fact, Abrego Garcia has never been charged with a crime in either the US or El Salvador and won a 2019 ruling barring his deportation, as his life would be in danger if he was forced to return.

White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller declared:

He's a citizen of El Salvador, so it's very arrogant even for American media to suggest that we would even tell El Salvador how to handle their own citizens as a starting point.

This from an administration that is bullying the entire world with a tariff war, combined with territorial demands ranging from the “return” of the Panama Canal to the

annexation of Greenland and Canada.

Trump and his agents are using the case of Abrego Garcia to establish three interrelated pillars of presidential dictatorship: 1. The president is above the law and not bound by judicial rulings; 2. The president has unchallenged authority over foreign policy and war; and 3. The executive has the power to deport or detain anyone, *including US citizens*, outside the protections of the Constitution.

The Trump administration seized on a loophole created by the Supreme Court, which had upheld District Court Judge Paula Xinis's directive that the government should “facilitate” Abrego Garcia's return, after a Justice Department lawyer admitted the deportation had been an “administrative error.”

The Supreme Court's April 10 ruling sent the case back to Xinis, instructing her to clarify a portion of her order that required the government to actually “effectuate” Abrego Garcia's release, “with due regard for the deference owed to the executive branch.” This language is now being used by the administration to pretend that it is not defying the lower court order, by citing the Supreme Court's unanimous ruling that actually upheld that order.

Whatever the pseudo-legalistic hairsplitting, the White House is neither “facilitating” nor “effectuating” Abrego Garcia's release. It is insisting that he will remain imprisoned in El Salvador.

The Trump administration's position is that its actions cannot be restrained by the judicial branch of government—which, according to the Constitution, is a co-equal branch of government. This began with the open defiance of the initial ruling by Judge James Boasberg last month, which ordered the deportations halted. Since then, Trump and his allies have launched an increasingly open and ferocious campaign against what they call “radical” and “lunatic” judges.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio denounced the ruling by Judge Xinis requiring the administration to return Abrego

Garcia to the US. “The foreign policy of the United States is conducted by the President of the United States, not by a court,” Rubio declared. “It’s that simple.”

On Sunday night, the Department of Justice filed a seven-page brief with Judge Xinis making the same assertion: that the US president has unchallengeable authority in US foreign affairs. “The federal courts have no authority to direct the executive branch to conduct foreign relations in a particular way,” it stated, citing the “exclusive power of the president as the sole organ of the federal government in the field of international relations.”

While the Constitution grants the executive branch primary responsibility for foreign affairs, this authority is neither absolute nor unreviewable. Congress has always played a major role in shaping and funding foreign policy, and both congressional legislation and executive actions are subject to judicial oversight if they are challenged as unconstitutional or illegal.

Forty years ago, Congress passed the Boland Amendment, prohibiting US government agencies from aiding the Contra rebels in Nicaragua. The Reagan administration did not dispute Congress’s authority, and when it was revealed that White House aides had secretly sold weapons to Iran to fund the Contras in violation of the law, top officials were forced to resign. Some were prosecuted and convicted, and Reagan himself narrowly avoided impeachment because the Democratic Party protected him.

Even then, the scandal was largely buried to preserve the legitimacy of the military-intelligence apparatus. Today, by contrast, the Trump administration’s flagrant and daily violations of the Constitution are met with silence from the Democratic Party, the courts and the corporate media.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the Trump administration is seeking to establish a precedent for removing US citizens from any judicial process.

At the White House Monday, Trump closed out the fascist backslapping session by suggesting, in response to a media question, that he was considering the deportation of US citizens, and not only immigrants, to the Salvadoran prison system. While the question referred to “fully naturalized” US citizens, Trump’s answer made no reference to naturalization and would apply to any US citizen who fell afoul of his government. He said:

We have bad ones too, and I’m all for it. Because we can do things with the president [Bukele] for less money and have great security. And we have a huge prison population. ... We have others that we’re negotiating with. But no, if it’s a homegrown criminal, I have no problem...

He added, “Now we’re studying the laws right now, Pam [Bondi] is studying. If we can do that, that’s good.” Trump also told Bukele that he’ll need to build more prisons to deal with “home grown,” i.e., US citizens.

The trajectory of the Trump administration is unmistakable. As Supreme Court Justices Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson warned in a statement accompanying the April 10 ruling:

The Government’s argument, moreover, implies that it could deport and incarcerate any person, including US citizens, without legal consequence, so long as it does so before a court can intervene.

According to press reports, at least a dozen Democratic representatives have sent letters to the Trump administration and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) seeking information on reports of US citizens being interrogated and even arrested and detained by agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). One letter asked the DHS to provide a list of every US citizen detained since Trump’s inauguration. None of these letters has been answered.

However, as Trump establishes the framework of dictatorship, he has been aided and abetted by the Democratic Party. The congressional leadership of the Democratic Party and leading figures like Obama, Biden, the Clintons and Kamala Harris have all kept silent. As the White House wages a rampage against the Constitution, the Democrats have worked to demobilize and suppress broad-based popular opposition.

The measures being implemented by the Trump administration are directed, above all, against the working class. The precedent being set in the case of Abrego Garcia will be used to criminalize all forms of opposition to the corporate and financial oligarchy that the administration serves. In the eyes of Trump and his fascist allies, any expression of resistance—from protests to strikes—is a threat to “national security” that must be met with brute force.

The defense of democratic rights cannot be entrusted to any of the institutions of the capitalist state. It requires the independent mobilization of the working class, armed with a socialist program to put an end to dictatorship, war and the capitalist system that gives rise to them.



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