Pentagon sets January 1 deadline to set up National Guard “riot control” units

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A Pentagon internal memo, made public in several news reports Wednesday and Thursday, sets a January 1 deadline for the establishment of “quick reaction” forces of about 500 National Guard soldiers in each of the 50 states which could be deployed within 24 hours’ notice to suppress “civil unrest” in American cities.

The memo follows an executive order issued by President Trump in September, after the occupation of Washington D.C. by thousands of National Guard troops and armed federal agents, ostensibly for the purposes of “fighting crime” and protecting federal agents as they carry out violent raids targeting immigrants for arrest, detention and deportation.

The total number of soldiers in all 50 states and four territories comes to 23,500, with a few states and territories allowed to provide fewer than 500 soldiers because of their small populations, including Guam, the Virgin Islands, Delaware and Alaska.

In each of the states, the Pentagon is sending in personnel to provide training in crowd control, handling of detainees, and use of “non-lethal” weapons such as batons, tasers and launchers for teargas and pepper balls.

A report Thursday on the website of the *Washington Post* drew out the implications of the training and equipment directives:

> The Pentagon has ordered thousands of specialized National Guard personnel to complete civil unrest mission training over the next several months, an indication that the Trump administration’s effort to send uniformed military forces into urban centers—once reserved for extraordinary emergencies—could become the norm…
>
> The mandate, along with the growing presence of federal and immigration enforcement officers, suggests further military deployments within the United States could grow in size and scope.

The *Post* cited an October 8 memo from National Guard Bureau Director of Operations Maj. Gen. Ronald Burkett, approving the dispatch of military trainers to every state to ensure that every quick reaction force will be up and running by January 1, 2026. This date is much earlier than previously reported, and indicates that the Trump administration is preparing to suppress protests well before the November 2026 congressional elections.

According to the memo, the National Guard Bureau will train and equip state units in “civil disturbance operations” and provide each unit with “100 sets of crowd control equipment.” In each state, troops must learn how to “form Squad-sized Riot Control Formation,” how to “employ a Riot Baton as a Member of a Riot Control Formation,” and how to “Supervise a Riot/Crowd Control Operation.” Each state must report monthly on its progress via an online defense readiness reporting system.

In the course of his visit to Japan and South Korea, would-be dictator Trump reiterated his claim to absolute authority over deploying National Guard and regular troops within the United States. In a speech to an audience of sailors, he declared, “We’re sending in our National Guard, and if we need more than the National Guard, we’ll send more than the National Guard, because we’re going to have safe cities.”

Asked later about this remark, he told reporters that judges had no right to review his military decisions,

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particularly if he invoked the Insurrection Act: “The courts wouldn’t get involved. Nobody would get involved. And I could send the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines. I could send anybody I wanted.”

While Trump has deployed National Guard troops to Washington D.C., Memphis and Los Angeles since June, orders to deploy troops to Chicago, and Portland, Oregon have been blocked by federal court rulings, which the administration is challenging at the Appeals Court level and the Supreme Court.

In the case of Chicago, where ICE agents have carried out their most violent and provocative attacks against immigrant communities, the Supreme Court Wednesday asked for additional briefs from both the Trump administration and the state of Illinois over whether Trump can deploy troops from Illinois and other states into Chicago. This means that a ruling is unlikely until mid-November.

The California Department of Justice wrote in an amicus brief to the Supreme Court that the Trump administration was arguing for a definition of “rebellion” to include “resistance or opposition to authority or tradition,” and even disobeying “a legal command or summons.” The state brief cited the history of the issue, declaring, “it is not remotely plausible to think that Congress intended to adopt that expansive definition.”

In Portland, the federal appeals court reversed an initial decision by a three-judge panel to overturn a lower-court order blocking the deployment of the National Guard. The full appeals court will now review the issue.

In a separate proceeding before District Judge Karen Immergut, the same judge who issued the order blocking deployment in Portland, state and local officials have charged that the Trump administration should be held in contempt of court for disobeying the injunction. A three-day trial began on Wednesday, with the federal Department of Justice admitting for the first time that some National Guard soldiers were deployed to the Immigration and Customs Enforcement detention center in Portland after the judge issued her order.

In his opening statement, Deputy Assistant Attorney General Eric Hamilton argued that the protests at the ICE facility were disruptive, and declared, “The Department of Homeland Security cannot contain this threat itself.” The president had the authority to federalize the Oregon National Guard, and “The president’s judgment is not subject to judicial review,” he claimed, making Trump effectively all-powerful.

Meanwhile, the Department of Justice admitted in a letter to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, the San Francisco-based appeals court which is considering the Portland case, that there were numerous “errors” in the administration’s account of the events in that city, including overstating the number of Federal Protective Service officers that were sent there to guard the ICE detention center. This figure has been repeatedly cited as the reason that it was necessary to call up 200 Oregon National Guard troops.

The Seventh Circuit, which is handling the Chicago appeal, wrote October 11 that lower courts “found that all three of the federal government’s declarations from those with firsthand knowledge were unreliable to the extent they omitted material information or were undermined by independent, objective evidence.” In other words, the Trump administration has systematically lied about the facts on the ground in both cities in order to justify its mobilization of the National Guard.

Also in Chicago, a Democratic congressional candidate was indicted on federal charges of conspiracy to impede or injure an ICE officer and assaulting that officer. Kat Abughazaleh, a 26-year-old Palestinian-American, is challenging longtime Democratic incumbent Jan Schakowsky in a heavily Democratic district in the northern Chicago suburbs, centered on Evanston.

The case involves Abughazeleh and five other protesters banging on the car of the ICE agent who was trying to force his way through a crowd outside the ICE detention center in suburban Broadview. The charges could carry prison sentences of six years and eight years respectively, in what Abughazaleh called a “political persecution.”

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