

One year since Trump's military occupation of Washington D.C.: A milestone in the march toward dictatorship

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One year ago this month, on August 11, 2025, President Donald Trump stood before cameras at the White House and declared “liberation day” for the nation’s capital and ordered the military occupation of the city.

Washington has not seen a sustained armed military presence of this scale and duration since the Civil War, when Union forces garrisoned the city against Confederate attack. At its peak, the roughly 5,000 troops deployed were more than the number that General Robert Ross and Rear Admiral George Cockburn brought in 1814 when British forces sacked and burnt the capital.

Trump, invoking Section 740 of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act—a provision permitting the president to commandeer the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department under conditions of “an emergency nature”—announced that Attorney General Pam Bondi would assume direct control of the city’s police force. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth was directed to “coordinate with governors” to “authorize the ... National Guard as he deems necessary” and to be “prepared to send the military if needed.”

Some 800 National Guard troops from several Republican-governed states flooded the streets of Washington. In any other location, this would have been a flagrant violation of the Posse Comitatus Act, which bars the use of federal military forces for domestic law enforcement. But the District of Columbia, under direct congressional rule, is an exception.

The pretext was as transparent as it was cynical. Violent crime in Washington had been falling since 2023. The city’s crime rates in 2024 were already at their lowest levels in three decades, according to the Department of Justice’s own figures—and remain so today, one year on. Nevertheless, Trump seized on the attempted carjacking of a 19-year-old former Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) operative to declare a “public safety emergency,” despite the two teenage suspects already being in police custody.

“The National Guard are not protecting or serving for my benefit,” said Regina, a Washington D.C. resident, to the *World Socialist Web Site*. “I think what Trump is doing is ridiculous. It’s not helping ... he’s doing it because this is who he serves: the banks, the billionaires. He’s got billionaire people on his team.” She added, “He’s a monster and we need to get him out of here.”

Stopping crime was never the point. With each successive deadline, rather than withdrawing, the administration has

escalated. Deployment end dates have shifted half a dozen times, from November 30, 2025, to January 20, 2029—the day Trump is constitutionally required to leave office. What began as 800 troops—legally authorized for no more than 30 days under the Home Rule Act’s provision, which expired September 10, 2025—metastasized into a permanent military presence exceeding 5,000 at its peak during last month’s July 4 festivities.

On November 20, 2025, U.S. District Judge Jia M. Cobb found the deployment unlawful, ruling it usurped the role of civilian police. The administration’s appeal has served only to buy time to maintain and expand it.

The Guard contingents are drawn from states run by Republican allies of the administration. South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster made explicit what the deployment represents, stating his state’s troops are in Washington “to support President Trump in his mission.” As one attendee at the August 23 downtown Grand Prix race wrote on social media: “They had that place locked down with security at every corner.”

That spectacle, staged under the banner of the 250th anniversary of America’s founding, marks a critical turning point. Trump used the occasion to assemble thousands of additional troops alongside gladiatorial cage matches, a stillborn “America’s Fair” featuring Confederate flags, and an Indy 500-style street race—not to provide security, but to acclimatize the population to life under military supervision.

Among the grievances enumerated in the Declaration of Independence against King George III was precisely the stationing of standing armies among the civilian population without the consent of the governed. That the 250th anniversary of that document was used as a subterfuge for assembling an occupying force is a calculated obscenity against every principle the Declaration represents.

Troops have conducted “presence patrols” through federal parks, Metro stations and residential neighborhoods, enforced youth curfews, supported ICE operations and conducted homelessness sweeps. NPR has reported that “legal experts, activists and watchdog groups worry the Trump administration could fundamentally change the way the military is used on U.S. soil,” citing the “upcoming 2026 midterm elections” as a flashpoint for “what armed troops on the streets could mean as voters cast ballots.”

More significant still is the role such a force could play in a future contested election. On January 6, 2021, Trump’s fascist foot soldiers besieged the U.S. Capitol to prevent the transfer of power following his 2020 electoral defeat. Mobs constructed gallows on the steps of the legislature. Armed thugs moved through the building searching for members of Congress. For three and a half hours, the military did nothing—intervening only once it was clear the coup had failed on the ground.

The lesson Trump drew was not that his objectives were wrong, but that his methods were insufficient. Since returning to power, he has moved deliberately to correct those deficiencies: building up military presence gradually, staffing it from loyalist states, normalizing it incrementally. The Supreme Court’s 2024 ruling granting presidential immunity for “official acts” has removed the last formal legal constraint on this process.

The occupation of Washington has not unfolded in isolation. It has run alongside ICE deployments across the country, including the effective occupation of Minneapolis, which provoked mass protests nationally. As agents were withdrawn from some cities in the face of popular resistance, they were redeployed—critically, to the nation’s airports. In March 2026, the WSWS reported that “the administration is normalizing the use of armed immigration agents in major civilian spaces under the pretext of ‘security,’ while its political allies openly describe these measures as preparation for election intervention.”

The deployment has been sustained by the political capitulation of local Democratic officials and the complicity of the national party. As the anniversary arrived, the military occupation of the capital has been treated as a local issue; no prominent national Democratic leaders issued statements. When Trump first ordered the occupation, the *Washington Post* editorial board treated it as a well-intentioned tactical error, writing that the city’s non-existent crime problems “are not the types of problems that can be easily tackled from the Oval Office or by swarming the city’s streets with Humvees.” Instead, the editorial advised Trump to pursue “sustainable fixes” like hiring more police officers.

Collaboration, not opposition, has been the Democratic Party’s organizing principle throughout. When the 30-day window elapsed, outgoing Democratic Mayor Muriel Bowser provided the administration a critical workaround, pledging in September 2025 to give Trump full operational collaboration with the Metropolitan Police without further invocation of the Home Rule Act.

Bowser has conducted herself throughout as a cooperative instrument of the administration—demolishing “Black Lives Matter Plaza,” a symbolic reference to the protests against police brutality that swept the globe in 2020 and shook the first Trump administration. She has declared D.C. a non-sanctuary city, and officiated at Trump’s “Freedom 250” Grand Prix through the streets of downtown Washington.

The response of the Democratic Socialists of America exposes the group’s bankrupt character. Janeese Lewis George, the DSA-backed candidate who won D.C.’s Democratic primary in June and is all but certain to become the city’s next mayor, issued an anniversary statement correctly noting injuries, family separations, and the killing by federal agents of Julian Bailey and Nolberto Meza—a father of five and a delivery driver killed under Trump’s

occupation—and declaring “there has been no transparency or accountability.” Yet nowhere did she utter the name “Trump.”

Her proposal was merely to employ “every tool at my disposal” to demand troops leave. Lewis George previously declared: “I am willing to work with anyone to the benefit of D.C. residents, and that includes President Trump and members of his administration. If the White House asks for a conversation or call, I am open to having that conversation or call.”

Ward 1 Council nominee and former D.C. DSA leader Aparna Raj was equally revealing: “We will continue to organize and protect each other. We just need Democratic governors to recognize their state’s safety is dependent on ours, and do the same.” This is the DSA’s program in a nutshell—pseudo-left declarations combined with prostration before the Democratic Party establishment.

The national pattern is identical. In November 2025, DSA New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani traveled to the White House—one day after Trump had called for the execution of Democratic lawmakers—to announce a “partnership” with the fascist president. As the WSWS wrote at the time, this “represents the upper middle class that the DSA speaks for aligning itself with the oligarchy for which Trump governs. These forces are more afraid of social revolution than they are of fascism.”

Throughout this year, cities across the country and internationally have seen mass protests, with workers and young people demonstrating genuine courage and determination. The fatal flaw has not been the absence of numbers but the persistent orientation of these mobilizations toward pressuring Congress and the Democratic Party—institutions that have demonstrated, again and again, that they will not act.

The WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party have advanced the construction of independent rank-and-file committees in workplaces, schools, hospitals and neighborhoods—organizations capable of mobilizing the working class independently of both corporate parties against assaults on living standards and democratic rights alike. Such committees have their precedent in the revolutionary Committees of Correspondence and Committees of Safety through which American colonists organized their revolt against the British crown—updated now to the conditions of the 21st century and to the task of working class emancipation from the oligarchy that has seized the republic those committees helped found.

These organizations must be guided by a program aimed not at pressuring the Democratic Party, but at mobilizing the industrial and social power of the working class to force the fascist government out of the streets, the airports, and Washington itself as part of an international movement for socialism.



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