

Tanks on the Streets of Washington, DC for the Fourth of July

2 July 2019

On the morning of July 4, the military bases on the outskirts of Washington, DC will be humming with activity.

If Donald Trump prevails in ongoing negotiations within the military over plans for Independence Day, M1A1 Abrams tank squadrons will be gearing up to roll over the Potomac toward the National Mall, while the Navy Blue Angel fighter demonstration squadron, Marine helicopter squadrons and F-35 stealth fighters prepare for afternoon fly overs of Capitol Hill.

Before dusk, with the roar of attack jets in the background, Trump will deliver a nationally televised speech to the gathered crowd of his supporters.

This display of military force in the strip of land separating Congress from the White House is a deliberate political provocation long planned by Trump and his fascistic advisors. By replacing the traditional Independence Day fireworks with a campaign-style rally featuring what will effectively be a military parade, Trump is testing his strength.

By asserting the personal power of the executive branch over the military, Trump is following the historic path to authoritarian rule and the abolition of constitutional rights.

The legislative branch, having already ceded to Trump the power to declare a “national emergency” and appropriate billions to fund his border crackdown, now faces the prospects of tanks in the shadow of the Capitol building. This past week, the Democratic Party voted to, (1) give Trump \$4.9 billion to fund his immigration crackdown, (2) fund the largest ever military budget, and (3) “back-fill” money Trump apportioned from the Pentagon to build a border wall. The Democratic Party is incapable of opposing Trump’s measures because they both represent the same social interests: finance capital.

Trump announced his July 4th plans in February, tweeting that the event will be called “A Salute to America” and will include “an address by your favorite President, me!”

On Friday, less than a week before the holiday, Trump’s Interior Department made the unprecedented announcement that the event would also feature military flyovers of the capital. Using carefully chosen words, Interior Secretary David Bernhardt said it would feature “an address by *our Commander-in-Chief*.” On Monday, the press reported Trump has also requested tanks and other military vehicles.

Preparations for Trump’s July 4th event date back to January 2017, when his inaugural committee fought to include military

personnel and equipment in his inaugural parade. Days before the inauguration, Trump told the *Washington Post*, “We’re going to show the people as we build up our military, we’re going to display our military. The military may come marching down Pennsylvania Avenue.”

While the military stopped Trump from carrying out this display, Trump attempted to line up soldiers behind him as he delivered his inauguration speech. In 2018, he again called for a military parade on Veterans Day, but this too was called off.

Since the midterm, Trump has continued to test his personal power over the military, proposing pardoning soldiers convicted of war crimes and demanding the Navy move the destroyer USS John McCain—named in part after Trump’s deceased Republican rival—out of the president’s sight.

Trump is not an aberration in an otherwise healthy democracy, however. He is the reactionary product of a protracted process.

The last time tanks and troops rolled through Washington was in June 1991, when 8,000 soldiers marched in the so-called “National Victory Celebration” marking the end of the first US invasion of Iraq. Then, like now, the military parade was directed toward a conscious political end. The 1991 parade took place in the midst of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with American imperialism declaring its unchallenged geopolitical hegemony over the entire world in what it labeled a “unipolar moment.”

Weeks before the military parade, President George H. W. Bush remarked, “We have finally kicked the Vietnam syndrome,” referencing the hope that a lopsided military victory would undo the widespread anti-war sentiment in the decades following the catastrophic war in Vietnam, which killed three million Vietnamese and 55,000 American soldiers.

The parade marked the beginning of an effort to systematically integrate the military into all elements of political and cultural life. After thirty years of permanent war, the US has committed sociocide throughout North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, and created disaster after disaster. Far from resolving the long-term decline in the global position of American capitalism, the United States looks out and sees competitors in every corner, while facing growing social unrest at home. The ruling class is feverishly preparing for world war and domestic repression.

That Trump is not an aberration is demonstrated by the response of the nominal opposition. Since Trump's inauguration, the Democratic Party has downplayed to the public the danger posed by Trump's efforts to mobilize the military in the capital.

When Trump proposed marching the military down Pennsylvania Avenue after the midterms, the Democrats refused to draw attention to the political implications of such a maneuver, about which they were keenly aware. Instead, Democrats claimed the parade would be "too expensive."

The corporate media dutifully went along with this dishonest narrative, opposing tanks on the streets on the ground that they would damage the city's roads! Yesterday, the Democratic-controlled City Council posted the banal wordplay joke on Twitter: "tanks but no tanks."

The real reason Democrats downplay the dictatorial nature of Trump's moves is their fear of opposition from below. Regarding Trump's July 4th plans, the *New York Times* wrote that "Eleanor Holmes Norton, a Democrat and the delegate who represents the District of Columbia in the House, said she worried that the president's presence would so politicize a family event that it could trigger anti-Trump protests."

The *Times* quoted Holmes Norton: "People are going to be angry. This is going to be the angriest July 4 ever. People are going to be so incensed that a political figure would take over the Fourth of July that you will find many who believe they will have to find a political expression of their disgust."

In a June statement by editorial board member Michelle Cottle, the *New York Times* similarly worried that Trump "cares not at all about public unity" and that his actions are "stoking the nation's divisions." Such statements expose the Democratic Party as accomplices in Trump's fascist moves.

Tens of millions of people are indeed "angry" at the historic crimes committed by the Trump administration, and rightfully so. Beyond his small base of support, Trump's dictatorial threats find little support among the broad masses of the population.

Trump's proposal for a military parade in Washington is part of an unpopular, increasingly authoritarian method of rule. He has repeatedly threatened to disregard the results of the 2020 elections if he loses—a fact which leading Democrats have dishonestly referred to as a "joke."

Last week, Trump threatened to use "overwhelming force" to "obliterate" Iran, dragging the US into another disastrous war. His administration is seeking to extradite and jail WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange for exposing war crimes committed by the US during the war on terror.

Trump's 4th of July event comes on the eve of the expiration of the two-week deadline Trump set in mid-June for launching military-style immigration raids in 10 cities.

With thousands of soldiers already deployed on the US-Mexico border under the auspices of a "national emergency," the nationally-coordinated raids raise the specter

of military deployments and martial law in some of the most populated cities in the country, including Chicago, Los Angeles, Miami, Houston, New Orleans, Denver, San Francisco, Atlanta and Baltimore.

Tens of thousands of immigrant children remain detained in inhumane conditions that doctors and lawyers have referred to as "concentration camps" and "torture facilities." The bodies of dead immigrant families are washing up on the shores of the Rio Grande. Yesterday, ProPublica revealed Facebook posts showing that thousands of border guards are out-and-out fascists who joke about murdering defenseless immigrant workers risking their lives for a better life.

The Democratic Party opposes Trump's threats of military parades not on democratic grounds, but because they are concerned Trump's personalist presidency and his erratic conduct are obstacles to maintaining US imperialism's geopolitical domination. The neo-McCarthyite efforts by the military-intelligence agencies and the Democrats to present Trump as a stooge of Russia and censor social media are equally anti-democratic.

The drive to dictatorship, Trotsky noted, can be compared to an overloaded electrical circuit. "Under the impact of class and international contradictions that are too highly charged, the safety switches of democracy either burn out or explode." It is the global and internal conflicts of American and world capitalism that have fatally undermined American democracy.

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