

Trump intensifies campaign to brand domestic opposition as terrorism

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The Trump administration is continuing its campaign for military intervention against the mass protests over police brutality that have swept the United States since the police killing of 46-year-old African American George Floyd on May 25. Attorney General William Barr and FBI Director Christopher Wray held a press conference Thursday afternoon to voice lying claims that left-wing groups bent on violence had “hijacked” the protests, in an effort to manufacture a pretext for repression.

Barr advocated the use of anti-terrorism units to apprehend “agitators” whom he accused of “hijacking” demonstrations. The branding of domestic political opposition as terrorism is aimed at delegitimizing and criminalizing all opposition to police violence and the policies of the oligarchy.

The level of lying in the Barr press conference would be admired by Nazi spokesman Josef Goebbels, the propaganda chief for Hitler’s “big lie.” Barr conjured up an invented world in which demonstrations involving millions of people in hundreds of cities, large, medium and small, are being manipulated by Antifa, an “organization” that has not a single identified member. He also claimed that “foreign actors” were intervening in the protests, adding the specter of a Russian, Chinese, Iranian or Al Qaeda role.

Antifa is little more than a label adopted by youth who protest against ultra-right and white supremacist provocations. As an organized group, it exists mainly in the fevered imaginations of FBI informers and agents—who likely comprise most of its “membership.” If Antifa did not exist (and it may not), Trump, Barr & Co. would be compelled to invent it, as a pretext for the mass repression that they are carrying out against the American working class.

Barr advocated the use of existing Joint Terrorist Task Forces against the supposed Antifa threat. The JTTF unite federal and state police agents in a common effort, initially directed against the Islamic fundamentalists who carried out the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York City and Washington, but now to be turned against all left-wing opposition to the policies of the Trump administration and

its collaborators at the state level.

FBI agents working through the JTTF will go out to question people about their political views, in gross violation of the First Amendment, and seek to criminalize their participation in protests. A Department of Homeland Security memorandum, obtained by Politico, cited the need for intelligence agents to be “vigilant in looking for any kind of emerging threat to the homeland,” while making the revealing admission that “some of the observed suspicious behaviors include constitutionally protected activities...”

Barr has emerged as one of the principal agents of Trump in preparing a presidential dictatorship. The “chief law enforcement officer,” as the attorney general is described, is actually a full-fledged co-conspirator in the assault of the US Constitution and democratic rights.

Trump has threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act, but unlike 1992 in California, no state governor has requested federal military assistance. So, the White House aims to use the District of Columbia, which is federal territory and not part of any state, as a demonstration of the use of overwhelming military force to crush protests and intimidate the largely African American population.

As press reports have begun to show, it was Barr who played the main role in the police-military attack on peaceful protesters in Lafayette Park, across the street from the White House, on Monday night. The anti-riot force of the federal Bureau of Prisons, under Barr’s direct authority since it is part of the Department of Justice, was the spearhead of the effort to clear the park, using tear gas, pepper balls, and other riot gear, so that Trump could take his massively publicized walk across the park and pose, holding a Bible, in front of St. John’s Episcopal Church, which had suffered minor fire damage over the weekend.

At the press conference, Barr hailed the role of myriad federal agencies in the DC repression, declaring, “We have deployed all the major law-enforcement components of the department in this mission, including the FBI, ATF, DEA, Bureau of Prisons, and U.S. Marshals Service.”

He recalled his own role in 1992, during his previous term as attorney general in the administration of George H. W.

Bush, the last time that a president invoked the Insurrection Act, during the upheaval in Los Angeles that followed the acquittal of the police thugs who beat Rodney King—an earlier racist atrocity by police that, like the killing of George Floyd, became a national scandal because it was filmed by bystanders and the whole country was able to witness the true nature of American “law and order.”

Vice President Pence, who was absent during the Lafayette Square provocation, has resurfaced as a fervent advocate of the Insurrection Act and the use of federal troops. In an interview with a Pittsburgh television station, Pence condemned the Democratic governor of Pennsylvania for only calling out 500-600 National Guard troops and threatened to send in the US Army instead.

“The president and I will continue to urge the governors, like Governor Wolf, to call up the National Guard, deploy them to the streets and in a strong and decisive manner to restore order. The American people expect nothing less,” said Pence.

While lies on the scale of those advanced by Barr may seem demented and unbelievable, there is a definite logic at work. It is part of a game plan to justify a military coup d'état that would place unchallenged power in the hands of the president. The gangster language of Trump and his accomplices, including aides like Stephen Miller and advisers like Steven Bannon, demonstrates that they are not playing by any sort of constitutional-democratic rulebook. They will do and say anything to carry out their plans to establish an authoritarian regime based on the military and the police.

The greatest danger for working people and youth would be to underestimate the dangers and believe—as the corporate media and the Democratic Party would suggest—that Trump has given up his plans for military rule because of opposition from within the political and national-security establishment. Spreading this poisonous complacency was the main function of the sermon delivered by Democratic Party operative Al Sharpton to the memorial service held for George Floyd Thursday in Minneapolis.

Sharpton was compelled to admit that the massive turnout at nationwide protests, with large numbers of young whites comprising a clear majority of those outraged and angry over the murder of George Floyd, marked something new in American political and social life. But he quickly turned to his real purpose: portraying the attack on Floyd as purely racial, thus concealing its class character as an attack on the working class, and the role of the police, whether white or black, as the repressive arm of the capitalist state.

Making light of Trump's threat to use military force against the protesters, Sharpton called the president “all bark and no bite.” This under conditions where at least a dozen

people have already been killed by police and National Guard since the protests began, and where Trump and his co-conspirators are actively preparing an intervention by the military on the streets of America that would mean a terrible bloodbath.

Not one prominent Democrat has denounced Trump for threatening a military takeover or demanded that he be removed from office. Presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden has been virtually invisible. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the top Democratic in Washington, merely sent a letter to the White House Thursday, requesting it to supply Congress with a list of the military and police agencies involved at Lafayette Park, as though there were not an ongoing effort to overthrow the constitutional structure of the United States.

The Socialist Equality Party has issued a call for workers and youth to oppose the White House plans to suppress democratic rights and impose a police-military regime. We said:

The working class must intervene in this unprecedented crisis as an independent social and political force. It must oppose the conspiracy in the White House through the methods of class struggle and socialist revolution.

The millions of workers and youth taking part in mass protests against police violence must begin to raise political demands against the gangster methods of the Trump administration, calling for the removal of Trump, Pence and their conspirators from office.

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