

Chad Wolf testifies before Senate committee

US Homeland Security chief defends police-state crackdown, announces federal paramilitaries to remain in Portland

By Barry Grey
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In testimony Thursday before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, the acting secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), Chad Wolf, aggressively defended the violent crackdown on anti-police brutality protesters in Portland, Oregon by paramilitary units of Customs and Border Protection (CBP), an agency of DHS.

Wolf also announced that the “full augmented DHS law enforcement posture” would remain on alert in Portland indefinitely, despite an agreement with state and local officials to draw back the militarized federal immigration police and allow Oregon state troopers to police protesters rallying daily outside the Hatfield Federal Courthouse in downtown Portland.

Wolf denounced the Democratic mayor of Portland and governor of Oregon as well as the Democratic-controlled Portland City Council, all of whom publicly opposed the deployment of the federal police by President Trump and repeatedly demanded their removal. He presented an Alice in Wonderland version of events, according to which violent and criminal mobs of left-wing terrorists and Antifa-linked anarchists attempted night after night to destroy the courthouse and violently attacked the CBP paramilitaries.

In Wolf’s telling—echoed by the Republican majority on the committee—his forces were “abandoned” by local and state authorities, who, by implication, were complicit in rampant mob violence.

He also attacked the Portland City Council for “prohibiting local police cooperation and ‘information sharing’ with “federal law enforcement,” i.e., Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and CBP agents who arbitrarily detain immigrants and jail or deport them.

He denounced the media coverage, which documented to some extent the brutal attacks on peaceful demonstrators carried out by CBP police, including a specially trained

fascistic unit called BORTAC, using tear gas, flash-bang grenades, truncheons and “impact munitions.” At least one demonstrator, 26-year-old Donovan LaBella, was critically wounded when a paramilitary officer shot him in the head and cracked his skull.

Wolf specifically defended the chilling practice carried out in Portland of seizing protesters blocks away from the courthouse, trundling them into unmarked vehicles and taking them to secret locations to be interrogated, without probable cause and in many cases without any charges being laid. This trademark of military dictatorships and fascist regimes he called a “common de-escalation tactic.”

He boasted that his agents had arrested 99 Portland protesters on federal charges and added that “the next 30 days will see a lot more activity in terms of charging people.” The *Washington Post* reported Thursday that the charges include assaulting a federal officer, arson, damaging federal property and operating a drone in a restricted area. There are 24 felony and 45 misdemeanor charges, carrying prison sentences of up to 20 years.

The police-state assault on protesters in Portland is an extension of the Gestapo-style campaign against immigrants being carried out by Trump and his fascistic aide Stephen Miller, in which Wolf’s immigration police have served as Trump’s personal militarized force. In February, the White House confirmed that it was deploying BORTAC to conduct immigration roundups in cities, such as Portland, where local governments have ordered local police not to fully comply with federal immigration officials.

So-called “sanctuary cities” where these special tactical units, which have served in Washington’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, have been deployed include Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, Houston, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York, San Francisco and Newark.

Committee Chairman Ron Johnson, Republican from

Wisconsin, set the tone for the rest of the Republicans on the panel in his opening remarks. He named two police officers killed in the course of the nationwide, multiracial protests against racism and police violence that erupted in response to the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police on May 25. He then cited DHS to claim that 277 attacks on police and federal officers occurred “during those ‘peaceful protests’ that started in May.”

This grotesquely distorted presentation of the protests—which were savagely attacked by local police and National Guard troops—was conflated with statistics showing an increase in urban crime during the pandemic to claim that the protests have unleashed “anarchy” and an out-of-control crime wave on the country.

This narrative, which echoes that of the White House, is aimed at justifying the imposition of dictatorial rule, based on the military and the police, including fascistic forces being encouraged by Trump both inside and outside the repressive organs of the state. It is the response of a ruling class discredited by its catastrophic handling of the coronavirus pandemic, following decades of self-enrichment, war and attacks on working-class living standards, and terrified of the growth of popular opposition and hatred for capitalism.

The Democrats are no less petrified at the prospect of a mass movement of the working class. Their response to the wave of protests has been to align themselves even more closely with the military, the FBI and the CIA, while seeking to hijack the protests and channel them behind a racist narrative. The Democratic Party and allied media, led by the *New York Times*, interpret every issue—from the pandemic, to unemployment, to police killings—almost entirely as manifestations of racism, concealing the basic class divisions in society that underlie racial discrimination, and working to divide the working class.

None of the Democrats at Thursday’s hearing raised the fundamental threat to democratic rights posed by the police-state policies of DHS and the Trump administration, which were defended across the board by Wolf. They were silent on Trump’s attempted coup on June 1, which preceded the crackdown in Portland and deployment of federal police to many other cities. On that day, Trump threatened to invoke the 1807 Insurrection Act and deploy active-duty troops across the country to crush the protests against police violence.

He was stopped at that point by the military brass, which considered such a move premature and unprepared, and likely to set off a mass popular uprising that could spiral out of control. But as the *World Socialist Web Site* warned, the danger of an anti-constitutional coup d’etat remained, and the authoritarian plotting centered in the White House

continued.

The ranking Democrat on the committee, Michigan Senator Gary Peters, meekly criticized Wolf for undermining public trust in the DHS through his “heavy-handed” tactics, and said the “singular focus on protecting federal property is distracting the department from addressing the threat posed by domestic terrorism” He demonstratively did not defend the state and local Democratic officials in Oregon who were attacked by Wolf. Nor did he defend the protesters from the DHS head’s slanders.

Kamala Harris of California, reportedly at the top of Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden’s list for vice president, along with former Obama National Security Adviser Susan Rice, also failed to defend the protesters. She focused her questions on suggestions that Wolf was acting in concert with Trump and tailoring his provocative policies to Trump’s reelection campaign.

Just in the week preceding Thursday’s hearing, the *Washington Post* revealed that DHS’s Office of Intelligence Analysis had drawn up open source intelligence reports on two journalists who covered the protests in Portland and created “baseball card” dossiers on dozens of arrested protesters.

The *Nation* obtained a copy of a DHS intelligence report showing that Wolf’s department was targeting activists, branding them as “Antifa,” and attempting to tie them to a foreign power, a prelude to indicting them as terrorists. The leaked report named several individuals who had fought with the Kurdish YPG militia against ISIS during the period when Washington was allied with the YPG. This documented the plans to use the post-9/11 “anti-terror” laws to criminalize domestic political opposition on the left.

And on July 30, officers of the US Border Patrol, an agency of CBP and DHS, raided a camp set up by the migrant aid group No More Deaths in Arizona, 11 miles from the US-Mexico border, and arrested one of the activists.

Neither the anti-terror surveillance of protesters nor the raid on immigrant aid activists were raised by any of the Democrats on the committee.

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