

Donald Trump's June 1 coup attempt

written by Gary Wilson
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Members of the D.C. National Guard “dominate” the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on June 2, 2020.

On Monday, June 1, Donald Trump called Attorney General William Barr, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley to the White House, where he got on the phone with the country’s governors and proceeded to demand that they “dominate” the streets, saying, “Most of you are weak.” He told them that he was putting Gen. Milley in charge.

Trump said: “We’re going to take care of it. And we’ve got a number of people here that you’ll be seeing. Gen. Milley is here, who’s head of Joint Chiefs of Staff, a fighter, a warrior, had a lot of victories and no losses. And he hates to see the way it’s being handled in the various states. And I just put him in charge,” according to a transcript of the recorded talk.

The White House announced that Trump would give a speech later in the day. Although he didn’t mention this on the call, there were numerous reports that the president intended to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 — used by President Andrew Jackson to deploy federal troops to literally massacre a major slave rebellion led by Nat Turner in Virginia’s Southampton County.

The Insurrection Act gives Trump the authority to use the military to put down protests.

The afternoon of June 1 saw the unprecedented sight of Gen. Milley in battle fatigues, with Attorney General Barr, on the White House grounds in advance of Trump’s speech in the Rose Garden. They appeared to be reviewing the troops which were lined up facing the protests in Lafayette Park across the street.

Thousands and thousands of heavily armed soldiers

Suddenly, the whole nation witnessed the aggressive and violent action by 5,000 National Guard troops and federal agents, decked out in full body armor, to move the protesters out of the way just before the president came out to speak about dominating the streets, saying, "As we speak, I am dispatching thousands and thousands of heavily armed soldiers, military personnel and law enforcement officers."

Shortly after that, Trump led Barr, Milley, Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and others over to a church where he famously held up a Bible.

[A white National Guard commander](#) called the standoff in Lafayette Square "the Alamo," implying that the White House was under siege. The Alamo was a fort in the colonial territory of Texas, then a part of Mexico, where, in 1836, white slave-traders from the U.S. fought the Mexican government for the right to own slaves. Mexico had abolished slavery.

The Washington, D.C., National Guard is sometimes called the "Praetorian Guard" because of their unusual chain of command almost directly to the president.

A secret federal police force also appeared on the streets of Washington. Heavily armed and dressed for combat, this force had no identifying insignia. The Washington Post reported that the unidentified forces were under the command of Attorney General Barr.

The next day, perhaps symbolically, the Lincoln Memorial was occupied by a National Guard unit dressed for battle.

The 82nd Airborne, based at Fort Bragg, N.C., along with a military police unit from Fort Drum, N.Y., was headed to Washington.

It was stunning enough that the highest-ranking officer in the U.S. military was walking around the White House in battle fatigues, a man at war. That message was

confirmed that night with the general walking around the streets as if he were commanding the troops in battle.

Trump didn't invoke the Insurrection Act, but according to a June 10 New York Times report, it was a very close thing.

In a press conference the next day, June 2, Secretary Esper said he did not support using the Insurrection Act. When he ordered the 82nd Airborne to stand down and return to base, Trump countermanded it.

What followed over the next few days was a counter move. One high-ranking retired military officer after another, led by former Defense Secretary James Mattis, said they did not support military intervention. [Mattis compared Trump's response to Nazi tactics](#).

By Thursday, June 4, Milley himself apologized for his participation.

Trump responded with a threat to send the military to break up the Capitol Hill Autonomous Zone (CHAZ) in Seattle, a threat he repeated on following days. The threat remains in place.

All of the military officers who spoke out were careful in what they said, making their objections to only this specific instance of military intervention.

Dictatorship of capitalism

Because the state is based on armed bodies — the military and police — and its auxiliaries, the prisons, courts and so on, even the most democratic bourgeois government has a hidden dictatorship of capitalism. This is not necessarily a military dictatorship. But military dictatorships are sometimes brought in to rescue a capitalist government in crisis, especially when there is a popular uprising.

Karl Marx wrote on bourgeois military dictatorships and the 1851 coup by Louis Bonaparte in France. Bonapartism, as the term was used by Marx, refers to a situation in which the military seizes control in a country sharply divided, with the military introducing selective reforms to co-opt the demands of the working class and peasant farmers. In the process, Marx said, Bonapartists preserve and mask the power of the bourgeois ruling class.

Mattis said of Trump that he “does not try to unite the American people.” He then compared Trump to the Nazis, sowing divisions.

A military dictatorship, even one led by Donald Trump, is not fascism. Mattis invoking Nazis was a blur, not meant to be clarifying.

What is characteristic of fascism, as opposed to a military dictatorship, is the complete destruction of all working-class organizations — labor unions, civil rights groups, socialist and communist parties, and all the rights that go with them — the right to strike, to organize, to vote, free speech, free press and the other rights which have been the by-product of the class struggle of the workers and oppressed peoples. It is all of this as a whole that characterizes fascism, not just a single part of it.

The U.S. is in the midst of a great crisis, an economic and political crisis. Unemployment is in the tens of millions, at levels not seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Homelessness has reached record levels. For those workers who have jobs, pay is at record lows, income inequality at record highs.

Before the coronavirus shutdown, 44 percent of all U.S. workers were in poverty, not even a living wage. Almost 120,000 have died from COVID-19, with the spread of the infection and the daily death toll continuing. All of these have hit the Black and Brown communities the hardest, exposing the devastating conditions of racism in the U.S.

On top of that came the murder of George Floyd by the Minneapolis police, the police murder of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Ky., and the lynching of Ahmaud Arbery in Georgia. In response, an uprising for justice, against police terror, defending Black lives and rights has swept the country.

Trump could order U.S. troops to occupy U.S. cities to put down the uprising. But what he didn't consider was that those troops could say no. In fact, most of the soldiers probably support the uprising. Many of the soldiers come from the Black and Brown communities that are leading the protests. More than 55 percent of the whole population of the country say that the burning of the Minneapolis police station was justified.

General Mattis made a veiled reference to the problem of the troops. The soldiers [could refuse to follow orders](#) if they believed those orders were illegal.

The Pentagon has plans in place for a military occupation of U.S. cities. And a little more than a year ago they did a practice run. A Pentagon war game called the [2018 Joint Land, Air and Sea Strategic Special Program](#), or JLASS, offered a scenario in which members of Generation Z, "anti-capitalist extremists," launch a "Zbellion" in the U.S. in the mid-2020s.

The JLASS war game was recently revealed because the Pentagon had played a visible role in Trump's move for military occupation of major U.S. cities. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper had said on June 1, "I think the sooner that you mass and dominate the battlespace, the quicker this dissipates and we can get back to the right normal."

Apparently, the words "dominate the battlespace" came right out of the JLASS war game script.

