

A presidency above the law — and the struggle ahead

written by Gary Wilson
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An “ICE Out” protest in Des Moines, Iowa. Across the country, people are resisting the expansion of federal policing and mass deportations.

The United States is living through a profound political shift. A new, executive-centered form of rule is taking shape — a strongman presidency that claims the right to act without oversight, constraint, or accountability.

Trump’s current administration is moving faster and more aggressively than before. In under a year, he has concentrated enormous power in the executive branch, pulling decision-making on trade, immigration, federal spending, and even the mechanics of elections directly into his office. Government functions that once depended on congressional authority are being folded into the presidency itself.

This is not just a policy shift. It’s a restructuring of the state.

Governing by decree

A defining feature of the new authoritarianism is the White House’s rapid takeover of powers traditionally held by Congress. Trump’s current administration isn’t just using executive power more aggressively — it is using it as the primary way it governs.

The current administration’s use of executive power has been extensive and unprecedented in the post-World War II era. President Trump has issued 212 executive orders in the first 10 months of 2025, nearly matching the 220 he issued during his entire first term. These decrees have been used to tighten control over a vast range of policy areas that constitutionally belong to the legislative branch, including international trade, federal spending, immigration enforcement, and the imposition of tariffs. One of the most significant of these actions is Executive Order 14248, signed on March 25, 2025, and titled “Preserving and Protecting the Integrity of American Elections,” which directs a sweeping overhaul of federal

election procedures and places broad authority over voting access, oversight, and certification directly under the executive branch.

This isn't a bureaucratic reshuffling — it's the consolidation of state power into a single office. By pulling decision-making on core economic, immigration, and electoral functions into the presidency, the administration is weakening the role of Congress and reshaping the basic structure of governance. The center of gravity in U.S. politics is shifting toward unilateral rule from the top.

A national police force in all but name

At the same time, federal agencies built for very different purposes are being repurposed and merged into a single domestic apparatus — a national police force in all but name.

Constitutionally and politically, the United States has never developed a federal police force with general police powers — policing has been concentrated in the states — and no single federal agency has ever been entrusted with general police authority across the country. The FBI, for example, is a federal investigative agency — not a general police force — and its powers are limited to specific federal crimes.

ICE, the Border Patrol, and the National Guard are being deployed together across multiple states against migrants and protesters. Border Patrol tactical teams now conduct raids deep inside major cities like Chicago and Los Angeles, sometimes using military helicopters and Predator drones. Masked, unidentifiable officers appear in residential neighborhoods. Tear gas is fired into communities. These deployments erase the traditional lines between police, immigration enforcement, and the military.

This level of centralized, federal domestic force is new.

And it is being expanded by pulling thousands of personnel from the FBI, DEA, and U.S. Marshals into mass immigration sweeps — a federal police force deployed to fulfill the White House’s political priorities.

Reshaping the military for political loyalty

Inside the military, the changes go even deeper. Trump’s Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, has launched a sweeping purge of senior officers — targeting career commanders, especially people of color, women, LGBTQ and trans officers — all under the banner of fighting “wokeness.” This isn’t about discipline. It’s about political loyalty: building an officer corps that answers directly to the executive.

The purge has been accompanied by an assault on the military’s internal legal system. The administration fired key Judge Advocate General officers — top military lawyers — after calling them “roadblocks,” undermining legal checks meant to keep the armed forces within the law.

At the same time, the Pentagon has ordered military academies to end consideration of race and gender, purge libraries of material referencing “white privilege,” and reshape training around a reactionary, politicized agenda.

Extremism moves into the state itself

As the administration tightens control at the top, racist and reactionary forces are being absorbed into the lower ranks of law enforcement.

Proud Boys and white-supremacist sympathizers have entered ICE, the Border Patrol, and local police departments. Far-right coded symbols appear in DHS and CBP recruitment materials, and officers inside these agencies increasingly align themselves openly with extremist currents.

Events like Charlottesville and Jan. 6 weren't the creation of a mass movement capable of overthrowing the state. They were test runs — identifying recruits and networks now being folded into the state's coercive machinery.

Political violence is being bureaucratized and professionalized under federal command.

Empire in decline, violence on the rise

This authoritarian turn at home is inseparable from the decline of U.S. global imperialism. As the U.S. slides deeper into crisis, the ruling class turns once again to militarism, economic sanctions, and the use of force — the core methods it has long used to defend imperialist power.

For most of the 20th century, the U.S. acted as a classic imperialist power — exporting capital abroad while easily attracting global investment because it was one of the most profitable places to produce. That period has ended. The Trump administration is now pressuring countries like South Korea and Saudi Arabia to pour billions into U.S. factories — like a developing country trying to force industrialization. Instead of capital flowing outward, the U.S. is using threats, tariffs, and military alliances to drag capital inward. It resembles a protection racket more than an empire: “Invest here or face consequences.”

This shift is a sign of decline: U.S. manufacturing profits are too low to attract investment on their own, so the ruling class now depends on political coercion — not economic strength — to hold its base together.

Nearly 14% of the entire U.S. Navy is now deployed to the Caribbean under Operation Southern Spear. This extraordinary buildup targets governments that refuse to bow to U.S. imperialist interests — Venezuela, Cuba, Nicaragua, and Colombia.

U.S. forces have carried out lethal strikes on vessels in international waters — killings condemned by UN human rights experts as “extrajudicial executions.”

This is what imperialist powers do in decline: Repression tightens at home and violence expands abroad.

The political space that still exists

But we need clarity about the moment we’re living in. The U.S. is moving into a harsher, more authoritarian form of rule, but it is not fascism — and that distinction matters. It means people still have room to organize, speak out, and take action. And that political space isn’t a gift from the system; it exists because working and oppressed people are fighting to keep it open.

Everything that’s still possible today — every protest, every walkout, every act of solidarity — survives because people refuse to back down.

If the system had already crossed into fascism, none of this would be possible.

The struggle is unfolding — not over

The United States is entering a new phase of authoritarian rule, driven by the crisis of capitalism and the decline of U.S. imperialist power. But the future is not predetermined. The capitalist state is tightening its grip — but there is still room to organize, resist, and push back.

Our task now is to expand that space — not retreat from it. Intensify the struggle: Stand with Palestine — stand against war — stand with all working and oppressed people. What we do now will shape what comes next.

