

Trump is hyping a case to use American troops on domestic soil

Analysis by Stephen Collinson, CNN

⌚ 8 minute read · Published 12:00 AM EDT, Wed June 11, 2025



Members of the California National Guard guard the federal building in downtown Los Angeles on Tuesday, June 10, 2025. Eric Thayer/AP

(CNN) — Posing as a wartime leader, President Donald Trump is building a political case to use American troops not in a foreign conflict, but at home, to bolster his mass deportation sweeps.

But California Gov. Gavin Newsom, the Democrat who heads the state leading resistance to a president with a taste for unchecked power, says a long-feared moment of peril is at hand for US democracy.

IN AN EMERGING CAMPAIGN WITH STARK CONSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS, TRUMP IS CONJURING A NARRATIVE OF INVASION AND INSURRECTION. He's exaggerating disorder in the relatively contained unrest, looting and protests in Los Angeles. And he's implying that, to keep the country safe, he's ready to deploy soldiers across the country.

Trump repeatedly and falsely claimed on Tuesday that if he'd failed to dispatch the National Guard and US Marines to Los Angeles, it would be "burning to the ground." The president also warned that he was looking beyond Los Angeles, as other cities, and states – especially those run by Democrats –

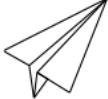
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"You know, if we didn't attack this one very strongly, you'd have them all over the country," Trump said in the Oval Office. "But I can inform the rest of the country that when they do it, if they do it, they are going to be met with equal or greater force that we met right here."

Then, in a highly politicized speech to troops at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, later Tuesday, the president portrayed entire neighborhoods of Los Angeles as locked in the grip of an occupying force of "transnational gangs and criminal networks."

"We will liberate Los Angeles," Trump said, as if he was referring to a city seized by a hostile foreign army. "We will use every asset at our disposal to quell the violence and restore law and order right away. We're not going to wait seven days and eight days and wait for a governor that's never going to call and watch cities burn."



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A day earlier, Trump had suggested that Los Angeles is just the start, saying at the White House, "We are going to have troops everywhere."



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In another development Tuesday that appeared to reveal the administration's intentions, the Department of Homeland Security confirmed that Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem previously asked Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to direct troops in Los Angeles to arrest protesters. The San Francisco Chronicle reported that Noem made the request – which would likely violate the law if ever carried out – in a weekend memo. DHS later clarified that Noem wrote the memo before she and Hegseth met with Trump.

Newsom responded to Trump's increasing pressure with a broadcast to California's citizens on Tuesday evening.

"Democracy is under assault before our eyes, this moment we have feared has arrived," said a Democrat who is seen as a potential 2028 presidential candidate. Trump is "taking a wrecking ball, a wrecking ball to our Founding Fathers' historic project – three co-equal branches of independent government. There are no longer any checks and balances."

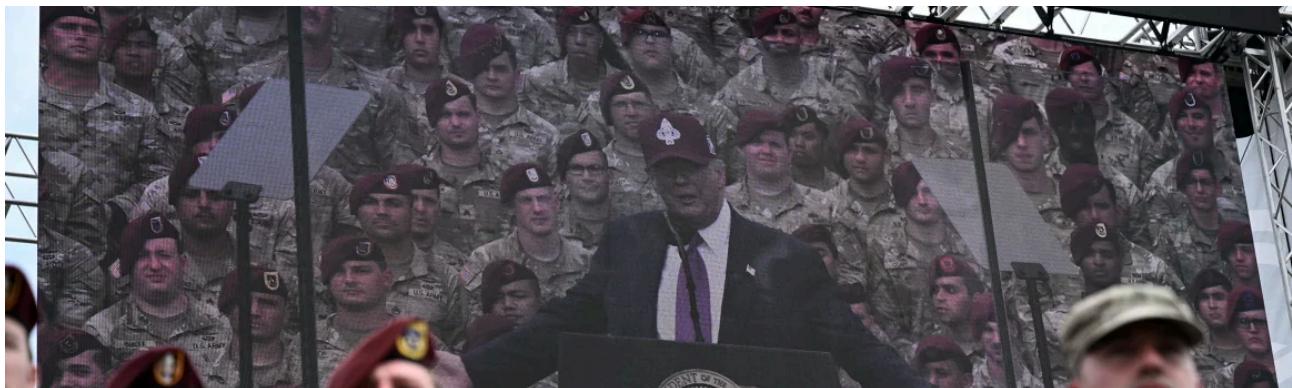
Rallying the troops against a perceived domestic threat

The president's trip to Fort Bragg celebrated the 250th anniversary of US Army, and in calmer times would draw little notice.

But his aggressive use of his authority as commander in chief has revived fears about his authoritarian streak.

Trump's speech – at times indistinguishable from a campaign event – was jarring given that the military is supposed to be a nonpartisan force. The optics were of a commander in chief rallying troops for a mission on his behalf.

Fort Bragg has been such a backdrop before. Twenty years ago, President George W. Bush used it for a national televised address to try to win back the public as it began to turn against the war in Iraq.





President Donald Trump speaks at Fort Bragg near Fayetteville, North Carolina, Tuesday, June 10, 2025.

Brendan Smialowski/AFP/Getty Images



M1A2 Abrams tanks are parked in West Potomac Park in Washington, DC on Tuesday, June 10, 2025, ahead of the upcoming US Army 250th anniversary celebration parade. Kevin Lamarque/Reuters

The current administration's handling of the situation in Los Angeles is also lending a foreboding tone to another event marking the Army's 250th birthday – a huge military parade in Washington this weekend. The spectacular just happens to be taking place on the 79th birthday of a president who loves basking in strongman imagery and the martial glow of soldiers and weaponry.

Trump set the tone with a dark warning in the Oval Office. "If there is any protest that wants to come out, they will be met with very big force," he told reporters. "I haven't heard about a protest. But you know, this is people who hate our country," he said of citizens potentially exercising their

constitutional right to peaceful dissent. “But they will be met with very great force.”

He amped up the authoritarian mood music as he headed home from Fort Bragg, portraying Los Angeles as a city at war – an illusion that would make the deployment of active troops seem more apt.

“I just want to see peace. If there’s peace, we get out. If there’s even a chance of no peace, we stay there until there’s peace.”

Trump’s strategy has worked many times before

This is more than typical Trumpian hyperbole. There’s a long tradition of autocratic-style leaders creating or exaggerating public-order incidents to justify the use of the military.

The protests have included scenes of agitators throwing projectiles at police, some looting and burning of cars, and other kinds of unrest, which state and local leaders have condemned – even while insisting the situation is nowhere near bad enough to merit troop deployments.

But from the start, the administration has worked to leverage the anti-ICE protests for political gain.

Trump suddenly announced on Saturday night that he’d send National Guard troops over the objections of Newsom – the first time a president has taken such action in decades. The reservists were followed by 700 active-duty Marines.

Trump’s dystopian evocation of Los Angeles as a city hostage to “paid insurrectionists” and “animals” is potentially laying the rhetorical groundwork for any future use of the Insurrection Act to allow domestic troops to make arrests and act in a law enforcement capacity.





Demonstrators march near Crypto.com Arena in downtown Los Angeles on Tuesday, June 10, 2025.

Leah Millis/Reuters

His strategy, which is gathering in intensity each day, is reminiscent of his claims that he won the 2020 election. This seemed absurd at first. But Trump's demagoguery whipped up a true uprising against the federal government and democracy at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. Millions of voters later bought into his narrative of a stolen election, which sparked the greatest political comeback in history in 2024.

It's easy to imagine the president cementing false impressions about the situation in California.

Still, Trump is prone to exaggeration and threats that are not always carried out. And his administration is yet to use troops on the streets of Los Angeles to directly confront protesters. They are mostly protecting several federal buildings – one reason Democrats balked Tuesday when the Defense Department revealed that the operation is costing \$134 million.

And the administration may have off-ramps at hand. Sources told CNN this week that officials were looking for alternative options to the Insurrection Act to bolster protection for federal agents working on immigration enforcement.

But Trump now has a long record of choreographing his intentions in public, and he often ignores advice to act with restraint.

It would be logical for him to try to co-opt the military to further his personal and political goals. After all, he's reshaped the entire US government and the powers of the executive to that role after returning to power.

Los Angeles is an 'experiment'

Los Angeles may not be an isolated crisis.

"I think we're an experiment, because if you can do this to the nation's second-largest city, maybe the administration is hoping that this will be a signal to everybody everywhere to fear them," Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass said Tuesday.

California's two Democratic senators, Adam Schiff and Alex Padilla, wrote to Hegseth and Secretary

of the Navy John Daher to warn that the deployment was an extreme and inappropriate step.

"A decision to deploy active-duty military personnel within the United States should only be undertaken during the most extreme circumstances, and these are not them," they wrote. "That this deployment was made over the objections of state authorities is all the more unjustifiable."



National Guard troops guard Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers during an operation in Los Angeles, in this image shared by ICE on Tuesday, June 10, 2025. US. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

Sen. Susan Collins, a Maine Republican, drew a distinction between Marines and the National Guard. "Active-duty forces are generally not to be involved in domestic law enforcement operations," Collins said.

Yet it's clear the administration has maneuvered Democrats into the familiar political weak spot they've often occupied since Trump burst into presidential politics and used immigration as a stepping-stone to power.

And many of his supporters will regard his tough-guy act as an appropriate dividend for their vote

last November and are unlikely to fixate on whether he's acting legally and constitutionally.

"ICE agents need to be able to do their job," Hegseth said during a [House of Representatives hearing](#) Tuesday, channeling the views of MAGA world. "They're being attacked for doing their job, which is deporting illegal criminals. ... And President Trump believes in law and order."

Noem, meanwhile, told reporters that Trump was merely protecting everyday Americans.

"This president is standing up for the average American who wants to walk their child to school every day safely, run their small business and provide for their families. That's the action that he's taken," she told reporters in the Oval Office.

But as usual, the president landed on a particularly resonant image – one that called forth the somber possibility that he now perceives the homeland as a war zone: "The only flag that will wave triumphant over the streets of Los Angeles is the American flag, so help me God," he told the troops at Fort Bragg.

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