**Thursday, Oct. 17, 2024 / Is Trump for real?**

**[HALF SECOND OF SILENCE]**

**[BILLBOARD]**

SCORING — “Ave Maria”

NOEL: At a town hall on Monday, candidate Trump took a 39 minute music break, during which time he said nothing, but he did dance a little.

SCORING WINDS DOWN

NOEL: Unfortunately, this is not that episode.

SCORING IN - Major league spaceball

NOEL: During his latest quest for the presidency, Trump has said the following:

He’d like to be dictator for a day.

He’d like one day of unlimited police violence.

He thinks maybe the MILITARY should “handle” Americans who might disrupt the 2024 election.

NOEL: And the response from his supporters?

*SHAWN: they would say things like, well, the dictator for a day thing is obviously a joke. He says that to make you people freak out I think he was asked by Maria Bartiromo like, what if there's violence around the election? And basically what he said is like, send in send in the National Guard and send in the military. And those people would think, hell yeah, you should do that.*

Coming up on Today, Explained

**[THEME]**

NOEL: It’s Today, Explained. Isaac Arnsdorf covers politics for the Washington Post lately he’s been covering the Trump campaign. Isaac, tell me about the latest outrage over the latest incendiary comment.

ISAAC: The latest flare up was over an interview that he did on Sunday with Fox's Maria Bartiromo.

[*<CLIP>*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DauQjmpqZM) *FOX NEWS:*

*Maria Bartiromo: How are you going to guard against the bureaucrats undermining you in a second term?*

*Donald Trump: Well I always say, so, we have two enemies. We have the outside enemy and the enemy from within. And the enemy from within in my opinion is more dangerous than China, Russia and all these countries…because if you have a smart president, he can handle them.*

SHAWN: which is actually language that he's used pretty consistently throughout this campaign. The little step further that he took on Sunday was adding that he thought any unrest over the election could and should be dealt with by the military.

[*<CLIP>*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BfSAOPPSYC8) *THE GUARDIAN NEWS:*

*Donald Trump: We have some very bad people, some sick people, radical left lunatics and I think they’re the… and it should be very easily handled by, if necessary, by National Guard, or if really necessary by the military, because they can’t let that happen.*

NOEL: Did Trump say who he was talking about specifically? The enemy from within… who is it?

ISAAC: You know, he often uses this kind of ambiguous “they” language. In this case, he was specifying that when he was saying radical left lunatics, one example was Adam Schiff, the congressman from California, who led the first impeachment and who's now running for Senate.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9DauQjmpqZM)*> DONALD TRUMP: Adam Shifty Schiff who is a total sleaze bag is gonna become a Senator, but I call him the enemy from within.*

But when it came to this suggestion of using the military, that was really about anyone who might be protesting after the election or the inauguration. And the the Harris campaign really jumped on this to sound the alarm and to reinvigorate a warning that Democrats have been sounding throughout this campaign about how dangerous they think Trump would be with a second term.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fB6pV0uE6I0)*> FORBES BREAKING NEWS:*

*Kamala Harris: He’s talking about the enemy within, Pennsylvania. He’s talking about the enemy within our country, Pennsylvania. He’s talking about that he considers anyone who doesn’t support him or who will not bend to his will, an enemy of our country.*

NOEL: The Harris campaign was bound to do that. What's been the response from other elected leaders in this country, both Republican and Democrat?

ISAAC: There was an interesting interview with Glenn Youngkin on CNN, where he was basically trying to squirm out of this and pretend that Trump didn't say what he said, which was is a pretty it is a pretty common pattern with Republicans asked to respond to things that Trump has has tweeted or said.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24YZmMdJKmU&list=RDNS24YZmMdJKmU&start_radio=1)*> CNN:*

*VIrginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin: I don’t believe that’s what he’s saying, but listen you and I are gonna argue about that but I would suggest…also…*

*Jake Tapper: I played the quote and read it to you! You can wish he weren’t saying that, but that’s what he’s saying.*

*Youngkin: Jake… all the time people are taking little snippets of content and turning into a big narrative…*

ISAAC: But, definitely on on the Democratic side, this has really put a finger on a lot of of fear about the stakes of this election and what re electing Trump would look like.

NOEL: What else has Donald Trump said recently that that might be considered akin to the enemy from within or, you know, deeply worrying?

ISAAC: At a recent rally in Erie, Pennsylvania, he spoke about basically giving police one really violent day to let it all out and kind of run wild and have their way with suspects.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAlgqkRp6gQ)*> FORBES BREAKING NEWS:*

*Donald Trump: One rough hour. And I mean REAL rough. The word will get out and it will end immediately.*

which, again, is like pretty similar to language that he's used consistently about encouraging police to to be rougher, encouraging hecklers to get roughed up. But it's just a little bit of a different spin on that idea.

NOEL: The one had that one had people talking about The Purge.

ISAAC: The movie?

NOEL: The movie. Yeah. Where it’s like…

*<CLIP> THE PURGE:*

*Polite Leader: Please just let us purge!*

ISAAC: You know, he's talked about how he wants to mandate stop and frisk and he wants cops to to bounce people around intentionally when they're putting them in the car. You know, he – graphic descriptions of violence are a very consistent component of Trump's speeches. Sometimes that's in the form of true stories about very heinous crimes that he's highlighting to in service of a point he's trying to make. Sometimes it's it's imaginary, sometimes it's images of things that that will happen to people or could happen to people that are really not based in verified reporting, but are just his imagination. And that is painting a very dark picture either of the country currently or what the country would look like if he loses. Back in the fall, Trump started using language about the enemy within, using a word vermin, which reminded a lot of people of how the Nazis spoke. And that sort of started this conversation about whether Trump wanted to be a dictator. And when he was offered the opportunity by a friendly interviewer, Sean Hannity, to put that to rest, he instead said:

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQkrWL7YuGk)*> WSJ NEWS:*

*DONALD TRUMP: He says, you’re not gonna be a dictator are ya? I said no no no, other than day one. We’re closing the border, and we’re drilling drilling drilling. After that I'm not a dictator.*

And so that's become this moment, this kind of defining moment of the campaign, which the Harris campaign will routinely use to say, you know, he admits he wants to be a dictator on day one. Those are his own words. And then Trump, on the other hand, will say, it's you know, it's just to drill or close the border, like I said, or, you know, I was joking and, you know, why can't you take a joke?

NOEL: When did Donald Trump start talking like this?

ISAAC: That's a theme of this campaign distinct from the previous ones. I mean, 2016 was, you know, a lot of vilifying and dehumanizing immigrants and Muslims and globalists toward the end, you know, whatever that means. Because of the social justice protests of the summer of 2020 and stoking of fear about violent left wing extremists known as Antifa, there was some of that language in 2020, but it really took off after he lost. You know, in order for there to be a huge conspiracy to rig and steal the election, you know, that requires that level of of opposition and kind of ambiguous but almost unlimited power somewhere, and then that that has really been the framing of his entire political comeback. There was a speech that he gave in at CPAC, the I am your retribution speech…

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.c-span.org/video/?c5060238/pres-trump-i-justicei-retribution)*> C-SPAN:*

*Donald Trump: I am your warrior, I am your justice and for those who have been wronged and betrayed, I am your retribution, I am your retribution. <<applause>>*

SHAWN: which really kind of defined this as the theme of what his candidacy was going to be about.

NOEL: The the sort of evergreen question with Donald Trump is the following. How worried should Americans be about the things that he says? Now, you're a reporter, and I understand that that means you're not a psychic. You can't you can't tell us what the next four years might hold. But you have covered this man, the former president a lot. What do you think of the question? How much should this really concern us?

ISAAC: You have a few sources of evidence to try to answer that question in an empirical way.

SCORING IN - Once a snake

You've got his record of what he did and tried to do, wanted to do when he was president the first time. You've got what he says about what he intends to do and you've got what the people who he's going to put in positions to to either implement that or restrain that. And the reality is, a lot of the people who were in those positions to exercise some restraint in the first term are not going to be invited back. And the people who will be in those positions are people who are eager to to see those ideas become reality.

SCORING BUMP

That was Isaac Arnsdorf of the Washington Post. Coming up: the Trump voters who like him in part because they don’t BELIEVE him.

**[BREAK]**

**[BUMPER]**

NOEL: Shawn McCreesh is a features writer for the New York Times Politics desk. And this year, he has been all over Trump country

SHAWN MCCREESH (Reporter, New York Times): usually at at least one rally a week. But also all sorts of other events that Trump goes to. So it could be a college football game in Alabama. It could be watching him address members of the military in Detroit. It could be a UFC match in Newark. It could be watching him go to a firehouse in lower Manhattan. And then other times, it's just the rallies.

NOEL: All right. So you've spoken to a lot of people who plan to vote for Donald Trump, some of them diehard fans. You recently wrote a piece called The Trump Voters Who Don't Believe Trump. What was that about?

SHAWN: This is about, there is a certain type of Trump voter who, you know, hears all of the more radical and anti-democratic things, he says, and they simply just don't think it's going to happen.

SCORING IN - The drop scone

They either don't believe he's being serious or they just assume that such things would never happen, and it's just bluster. And even if he wanted to do it, the wheels of government would sort of spring into action and prevent him. And this is a way of rationalizing, you know, his rhetoric for a certain type of person. This is different from a Trump voter who hears those proposals and promises and thinks ‘that sounds great.’ The most common one is that they just think, listen, this is Trump's style. This is how he speaks. He's this bombastic reality TV star. Nine years onto the scene. He's still not treated or thought of as a politician. So they think that, you know, this is how he talks. It's all part of the style. It's part of his negotiating prowess. And he's really over the top. And that's kind of the starting point of his negotiations. And, you know, the other the other rationale is that, well, look how it went the first time. You know, you guys in the media told me he was going to be a dictator and the liberals were hair on fire. And actually everything was sort of fine. And my 401k did well and my taxes got cut and he didn't pull us out of NATO and it was all okay. So that's pretty much how it'll be a second time.

SCORING OUT

NOEL: Where do you tend to find those Trump supporters?

SHAWN: As a setting for this story, I followed Trump to an address he was giving to the Detroit Economic Clubs. So this was you know, these people were in sort of windowpane suits and Gucci loafers and they had on cufflinks. And basically it was a bunch of rich white people. They were not, you know, people who go to rallies. They were not wearing shirts with pictures of his bloody face on it that said fight. They were not wearing red hats with, you know, fake Trump hair attached to it. They were not fanatic people. They don't like to think of themselves as fanatic. They just think, you know, of themselves as a business community that's picking the person who's smart for business. And so, you know, even among that crowd, I would say there were people that I interviewed that were down with 1 or 2 of his more radical proposals. And then other things, they thought, well, he's not going to do that. So, again, it's not that, you know, 100%. And I also sometimes find people at rallies that, really nice, happy people that don't think he'll do all of it. So it's a mix.

NOEL: And the people who do believe him when he says, I want to be dictator for a day, or when he suggests on Fox that maybe the military should handle people who disrupt the 2024 election, the people who think Donald Trump is being honest and genuine there, what do they like about that?

SHAWN: People just always use the word strong.

NOEL: Hah.

SHAWN: And there's a feeling that things have gotten out of control and crime is out of control, and this guy's just not going to take it. And it might sound a little rough and it might scare you people in the media, but that's what this country needs. And we like it. And and then, you know, other things. Nobody really thinks he's going to lock up his political opponents. I also to do the story, I went back through my notepad and called a lot of people, too, that I've met around the country over the years and pose these questions to them too. And the rally people were different from the Detroit people. But even some of the rally people, one of them, as quoted in the story, said, you know, he's going to throw anybody in jail. He said he was going to do that about Hillary. And look, he didn't do that. Like he knows how to not go too far and whatever. But then there's this whole other interesting element to it, which is that. A lot of the people who worked for him the first time around are sort of, you know, trying to sound the alarm that they were the quote unquote guardrails that prevented him from doing these things. So that's the whole other element to this, which is that Trump himself is saying a second term would be very different. And these people just don't… that's the part of it that they don't really square or believe.

NOEL: The comment Trump made about using the military to deal with people who might disrupt the election, It appeared to make a particular group of people very nervous, and that was retired defense officials who did not seem to think that Donald Trump was kidding, who did seem to think he should be taken seriously. You did some reporting on this. What are those people saying?

SHAWN: As I did this story, this was the same week that the Bob Woodward book came out. So General Mark Milley, you know, described Trump as fascist to the core.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9to_1UYH5rE)*> AP:*

*Former CJCS Gen. Mark Milley: We don’t take an oath to a King or a Queen or to a tyrant or a dictator. And we don’t take an oath to a wannabe dictator.*

SHAWN: he's just one in a long line of officials who who'd worked for Trump and said we had to work constantly to, you know, contain his most anti-democratic impulses. And there are all sorts of reasons for why a second term won't be the same. And, in fact, Trump himself was saying that in Detroit, he was sort of telling a tale of, well, I got to Washington. I'd only been there 17 times in my life. I'd never even stayed overnight there. I'm really a New York guy. I didn't know the way the town worked. You know, in effect, he basically said, I got rolled and he told them that the second time would not go that way. He said, you know, now I know the game better. And so a lot of these people, especially the Detroit crowd, comfort themselves by saying, well, he didn't do X, Y and Z last time, so why, you know, it would be the same. But it's this kind of irony where these people who worked from the inside to prevent him from being the darkest version of himself may ironically end up being the reason he gets another term in power because there are these people out there who think he's not as bad as he wanted to be because of those people.

NOEL: Mark Milley and Mark Esper, two former defense officials who have called Trump out, they are serious people. They're kind of old school political normies, and they're not household names. They don't have the kind of, you know, loyalty that Trump commands, but they are serious people. And it makes me wonder why so many of Donald Trump supporters seem so willing to ignore the warnings of serious people.

SHAWN: it's not just your garden variety Trump supporter. I mean, what I found to be one of the most I'll just say, eye opening things that I experienced on the trail this year was going to it was actually in Detroit again a couple of months ago watching Trump address this gathering of the National Guard.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsUc5zFrHHA)*> FOX NEWS:*

*Donald Trump: You are always ready and you are always there for us, and for the president of the United States, you are always there for me I will tell you, and I’m always gonna be there for you*

They were members of the National Guard from all 50 states, and they were there in their uniforms. And then the other half of the crowd were made up of former Guard members who had now become like private defense contractors, members of the military industrial complex, basically. And these people… this is supposed to be not a nonpartisan event, but usually both the Democrat and the Republican come and address this gathering every four years. But I mean, by the end of the hour, it was a Trump rally.

*<*[*CLIP*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AsUc5zFrHHA)*> FOX NEWS:*

*Donald Trump: Think of that, isn’t that amazing? Not one soldier was shot at, let alone killed, nobody killed. But I’m proud to be the first president in decades who started no new wars. And the reason I started no new wars is I respected the people in this room. It’s true <<applause>>*

These people were so excited about him. And I went around and interviewed all these veterans and, you know, members of the military and asked them, you know, why don't you care? Look at the way he's used the National Guard before. I mean, after his supporters ransacked the Capitol, it was the National Guard who had to go in and secure it and then sleep in the hallways and sleep in parking garages. And it was the National Guard he used to, you know, clear the protesters out of the streets so he could hold a Bible upside down in front of a flaming church. And, I mean, you people have been used in political ways because of him and his rhetoric and not to mention all the things he said about veterans and the military.

SCORING IN - Sadly here we are again

*<*[*CLIP>*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQ3Z1l-XvIk) *ABC:*

*Donald Trump: It’s actually much better, because everyone gets the Congressional Medal of Honor, that’s soldiers, they’re either in very bad shape because they’ve been hit so many times by bullets or they’re dead.*

They did not care. They loved him. They loved his rhetoric. They think it's his right as the commander in chief to use the forces as he will. They really loved the way that he talked about the military and supporting the military and making sure the military wasn't, quote unquote, woke and securing funds for it and things that he did for the Veterans Affairs, and they had all these different reasons why they loved him. And they just kind of shrugged at the rest of it. And I specifically asked them about his rhetoric of using the National Guard and everything else around elections and election interference and everything. And it was just sort of a giant shrug

NOEL: Shawn McCreesh. You can find his really excellent writing at nytimes.com. Victoria Chamberlin produced today’s episode with help from Eliza Dennis. Matthew Collette edited. Andrea Kristinsdottir and Rob Byers engineered. Laura Bullard fact-checked.

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I’m Noel King. It’s Today, Explained.

**[10 SECONDS OF SILENCE]**