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Democracy Dies in Darkness

We saw it with our own eyes: Trump wants to go to war against America

By **Jennifer Rubin**

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President Trump somehow imagined it was a good idea to unleash law enforcement on peaceful demonstrators before the 7 p.m. curfew Monday night as he stepped into the Rose Garden to give a knockoff version of Richard M. Nixon's "law and order" message.

The president who called NFL protesters peacefully taking a knee "sons of bitches," lied when he declared that he is a friend of peaceful demonstrators. The police firing rubber bullets and launching tear gas at protesters in Lafayette Square in front of the White House said otherwise. Then, as if the scene was not evidence enough of his desire to raise the level of violence, he pledged to deploy the U.S. military on U.S. soil, against U.S. civilians, if governors did not heed his incendiary advice to fill the streets with National Guard troops. It was later revealed that Trump instigated the assault on protesters specifically to make a gesture of walking to St. John's church.

Nothing could be more representative of the dangerous narcissism of a president in over his head, resorting to threats of violence against a country he ostensibly is supposed to lead. The deliberate instigation of violence for his own photo op tells Americans how deeply twisted and deformed his character is.

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His stunt was designed to play to the most rabid white evangelicals, who inexplicably have always seen themselves — not African Americans — as the true victims. The invocation of a religious institution to justify an assault on peaceful protesters was as great an abuse of religious symbols as anything Trump has done. Surely, he never heard of the “Blessed are the peacemakers” passage from the Christian bible. He worships not peacemakers but instruments of brute force.

Moreover, any attempt to use the military against civilians in this fashion would almost certainly be illegal and unconstitutional. Even under the Insurrection Act, federal troops would have to be invited into the states to suppress an actual rebellion. For Trump, the threat of force, however unrealistic, is his go-to move when his manliness is called into question — as it was when he fled to the bunker at the White House over the weekend.

If anyone in America had any doubt as to his intentions — to foment violence, to increase racial animosity, to glorify himself at the expense of the national good — Tuesday’s events should silence them. Democrats and any Republicans with a modicum of decency should denounce the stunt, call for a full review of the incident and conduct congressional oversight. We hope a strong bipartisan assembly of elected officials joins the protesters at the White House, and that one or more civil rights groups will file suit for use of excessive force and deprivation of the peaceful protesters’ rights of assembly and free speech. You are either for Trump or for democracy at this point.

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It does not take much imagination to conclude Trump is attempting to escalate violence around the country so he can deploy the military. This is the conduct of a tin-pot dictator — someone resorting to violent suppression of our most closely cherished rights.

More than ever, we should all recognize that, as former vice president Joe Biden put it, this is an election about the soul of our country and the survival of peaceful self-governance.

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