

I led National Guard and regular Army units. Using the military to intimidate Americans is 100% wrong

By Randy Manner

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For over 35 years, I served our nation in both the regular Army and National Guard. I served as both a part-time citizen soldier and full-time Title 10 officer after being mobilized in September 2001. In my career, I've had the distinct honor to lead both active duty and National Guard organizations, as well as soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines.

I have also stood in Red Square in Moscow, Tiananmen Square in China and the edge of the DMZ in North Korea. I have seen how some countries focus significant portions of their military inside their own nations to implement domestic policies and maintain control.

Two weeks ago – in a series of actions that brought us a little closer to that reality – the president sent the National Guard to America's second-largest city over the objections of the state's governor. Almost immediately after, he ordered active-duty Marines to go to the city. And on June 14, we saw service members ride tanks and march in Washington, D.C., to celebrate the 250th Birthday of the U.S. Army.

HEGSETH SPARS WITH SENATE DEMOCRATS OVER MARINE DEPLOYMENT TO LA ANTI-ICE RIOTS: 'NOT ABOUT LETHALITY'

These actions – as seen through my previous role as the No. 2 person in the National Guard Bureau – worry me greatly. I am concerned that the administration is transitioning the military's role from national defense to law enforcement. From protection to intimidation. This transition is a dramatic misuse of power and could lead to disastrous legal, operational and ethical outcomes.

National Guard members stand outside a downtown jail in Los Angeles following two days of clashes with police during a series of immigration raids on June 8, 2025, in Los Angeles, California. (Spencer Platt/Getty Images)

First, by sending the military to police our own citizens, we lose a needed separation between the military and our civilian population.

The military is designed and trained to defend against external threats, not police its own citizens. The Posse Comitatus Act specifically limits the military's role in domestic law enforcement and, for good reason – to keep military operations separate from civilian policing. This separation is fundamental to who we are as freedom-loving Americans.

'STATE OF REBELLION': EXPERT WEIGHS IN ON NEWSOM CHALLENGE TO TRUMP DEPLOYING NATIONAL GUARD

The U.S. military is the best trained in the world for its warfighting mission, but it is neither trained nor equipped for immigration enforcement, immigration detention or civilian arrests. This latest move only increases legal and ethical jeopardy for troops and further endangers the rights of the people of Los Angeles – all while risking the absolute worst.

Second, the administration's deployment of the military against protests undermines the readiness of our entire armed forces, pulling resources away from critical defense priorities.

National Guard units are composed of community members who signed up to serve their respective neighbors. They respond to

hurricanes, flooding, forest fires and more. By sending or threatening to send National Guard units across the country simply for constitutionally enshrined protests, we risk moving these units away from what they are designed to act on.

POSSE COMITATUS ACT AT CENTER OF TRUMP-NEWSOM NATIONAL GUARD DISPUTE IN LA

The Trump administration didn't just send the National Guard. They sent active-duty Marines as well. Utilizing military assets to put down protests and assist immigration enforcement officers detracts from the military's core mission: national defense. There are real threats abroad, and with our military involved in 160 countries across the globe, we must ensure that we're prioritizing the time and money of the armed forces efficiently.

The Pentagon already publicly stated that this deployment will cost \$134 million, and that's just the beginning. In fact, the unintended effects of this oversight are already clear: service members are sleeping on the floor at night.

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Yes, these actions taken by the president in the last few weeks are logistically and legally dubious. But there's a bigger problem at hand. They were taken primarily to intimidate and suppress speech, as well as undermine a governor. By using the military in this way, the president is misusing his power, both tamping down on free speech and usurping states' rights.

LA MAYOR HITS BACK AT TRUMP MARINE DEPLOYMENTS SAYING 'WE DON'T WANT THEM HERE'

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It doesn't matter if it's a blue state or a red state, an American president should not send in the military to suppress political opposition at home. By acting like this, the government risks breaking the trust between our military members and our communities.

Let's be crystal clear: those who commit violence must be held accountable. But at the same time, the right to peaceful demonstration and free speech must be protected. Nothing better demonstrates this point than the image of a U.S. senator being handcuffed and manhandled for voicing his opposition to the president's actions.

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No matter what your views, we're proud to live in a country where people have constitutional rights – such as the rights to free speech and due process under law. Matter of fact: it's why many of us sign up to serve.

My own family is proud to have served to defend these exact rights. My grandfather served in the Navy in World War II, my father in the Army in Vietnam, and my son in the Air Force in Afghanistan, flying search and rescue missions. The president is taking actions that we and millions of other veterans have stood against, and it's abundantly clear that his attempts to use the military to intimidate Americans is wrong, and it must end.

Major General Randy Manner, U.S. Army, (ret) served as the deputy commanding general of the United States 3rd Army in Kuwait, as the acting vice chief of the National Guard Bureau, and as the acting and deputy director of the Defense Threat Reduction Agency. He's also a member of National Security Leaders for America (NSL4A).

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