


ASTRONAUTS FOR AMERICA

DEPLOYMENT OF FEDERAL TROOPS TO AMERICAN CITIES

Founding Value: Consent of the Governed. Constitutional Principles: Federalism; Separation of Powers. Institutional Norms: Executive Constraint; Administrative Neutrality; Truth, Science and Evidence.

BOTTOM LINE

Beginning in June 2025 the President ordered National Guard troops to Los Angeles, Washington, Portland and Chicago, and 700 Marines to Los Angeles, over the objections of the governors and mayors involved and with no court order or documented legal rationale. Federal courts found the Los Angeles deployment violated the Posse Comitatus Act, and troops in all but D.C. were withdrawn. Congress should require judicial review, notice to governors and time limits on domestic deployments, and rewrite the vague 1807 Insurrection Act.

NARRATIVE

This is not a new grievance. Among the charges that led the colonies to declare independence, the [Declaration of Independence](#) accused the King of having “kept among us, in times of peace, Standing Armies without the Consent of our legislatures” and of “quartering large bodies of armed troops among us”: objections to military force deployed among a population without the consent of the governed or their local representatives. Federal deployment of troops domestically is not inherently unconstitutional. Article II’s Take Care Clause and the federal responsibility to protect federal property gave legal grounding to Eisenhower’s 1957 deployment to Little Rock, Kennedy’s 1963 federalization of the Alabama Guard, and Johnson’s protection of civil rights marchers. In each of those cases troops enforced federal court orders or stopped governors who were themselves violating the Constitution. The 2025 deployments had no such court order behind them.

Beginning in June 2025, the President, over the objection of the affected governors and mayors, deployed National Guard troops to Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., Portland, and Chicago. He also deployed [700 active-duty U.S. Marines](#) to Los Angeles. The administration’s justifications shifted among crime reduction, protection of federal officials and facilities, and suppression of civil unrest. In each case, local authorities said police and existing federal protective services were already handling it. Federal district [courts ruled](#) the Los Angeles deployment a violation of the [Posse Comitatus Act](#); Insurrection Act authority was not invoked, yet troops were performing “an active, direct role” in police activities as though it had been. The administration’s claimed statutory and inherent executive authority and its citation of civil-rights-era precedents were [rejected](#) by the [courts](#). Deployments were ended or (in the Chicago instance) prevented in all cities except for D.C. [Approximately 4,000 troops](#) remain in Washington, where the President is, by law, the [National Guard Commander-in-Chief](#), and, of course, there is no governor. A June 2026 study by the [Niskanen Center](#) found that “D.C.’s crime drop didn’t require a military deployment.” The Washington Post–Schar School Poll found that [80% of D.C. residents](#) were opposed to the deployment of National Guard in the city. Cost of the D.C. deployment alone is expected to approach \$1.4 billion by the end of the President’s term.

FINDINGS

PROXIMATE CAUSE(S)	CONTRIBUTING CAUSE(S)	ROOT CAUSE(S)
- Federal executive deployment of National Guard and Marines to Los Angeles, and National Guard to Washington, D.C., Chicago and Portland without state or local request, and over explicit gubernatorial objection. - White House invocation of 10 U.S.C. § 12406 statutory authority together with a claim of inherent Article II authority, neither supported by a documented legal rationale.	- Preemption of the constitutional principle of federalism: domestic law enforcement is a power reserved to the states under the 10th Amendment, and the Posse Comitatus Act (1878) was enacted precisely to prevent federal military forces from serving as domestic law enforcement instruments. - Erosion of executive constraint and administrative neutrality norms: the longstanding expectation that presidents do not direct the military against domestic political opponents or their constituencies. - Lack of evidence-based decision-making. A U.S. District Court judge	- Two decades of unchallenged expansion of emergency and Article II authority, across administrations of both parties. - Explicit characterization of targets by the President in a high-profile meeting with the nation’s top military leaders as “Democratic-run cities.” - Polarization: Stanford sociologist Robb Willer traces this to a collapse of cross-partisan empathy: opposing camps no longer accurately grasp each other’s core values, so norms that depend on mutual restraint stop holding. Deploying troops only to

concluded the [claimed rebellion in Los Angeles](#) was not supported by the facts, and inappropriate use of precedent (civil-rights-era deployments enforcing court orders).

cities run by the opposing party is that failure in action: governance as tribal contest, not constitutional.

Norm Erosion: *Executive Constraint*: the norm that presidents do not turn military force on domestic political opponents or their communities absent a court order or a true emergency, was the primary casualty. *Administrative Neutrality*: when the President told flag officers at Quantico on September 30, 2025, that he planned to use “Democratic-run cities...run by radical-left Democrats” as “training grounds” for the military to combat the “war from within,” he violated the norm of administrative neutrality, which binds both the civil service and the military. *Truth, Science and Evidence*: when leaders ignore or misrepresent valid data, including crime rates and injury statistics, they undermine the evidence-based standard of governance a self-governing people have a right to expect. Political scientists Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, in *How Democracies Die* (2018), identify executive constraint and administrative neutrality as the two most critical norms sustaining democratic governance, and warn that courts cannot enforce norms precisely because they are norms, not laws. When those guardrails erode, the remedy must come from legislators, the states and informed voters.

RECOMMENDATIONS

LEGISLATORS

- Pass [reforms](#) which require judicial review, notice to state governors, and time limits on domestic military deployments without congressional authorization, as well as an overhaul of the vague, antiquated language of the [1807 Insurrection Act](#).
- Committee leadership should hold joint oversight hearings on domestic deployment authority, with witnesses selected by majority and minority.
- Revisit the [1889 Act](#) authorizing the President to serve as Commander-in-Chief of the D.C. Guard. Give the mayor the same National Guard authority in the district as governors have over their states and possessions. About 700,000 D.C. residents should not be the only Americans left outside constitutional federalism.

GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVES

- State governors should assert their authority under the 10th Amendment, pursuing injunctive relief when federal deployments are unrequested and unsupported by documented need or court orders.
- State attorneys general should keep pressing their legal challenges.
- Military leadership should hold deployment orders to the standard our missions demand: a documented, verified go/no-go rationale, in writing, before any operation proceeds. Every military oath begins with the Constitution, and any promise of obedience it carries reaches lawful orders only.
- All government leaders must speak the truth to their staffs and to the public, and demand that their subordinates speak truth to power.

CITIZENS

- Support legal challenges brought by state attorneys general.
- Ask your representatives what oversight steps Congress has taken.
- Visit AstronautsForAmerica.org for a Sample Candidate Integrity Pledge.
- Consider [Robb Willer's research](#) on cross-partisan persuasion: arguments land better when framed in the other side's values: security, fairness, the rule of law. A citizenry that understands itself is harder to divide, and harder to govern without its consent.
- Use social media, and challenge local news outlets, to publicize inspiring examples of good government.
- Challenge your school boards to increase emphasis on civics at all levels.
- Vote!

Key Sources: *Posse Comitatus Act* (18 U.S.C. § 1385); *USNI News*, 700 Marines to Los Angeles (June 2025); *U.S. District Judge Charles Breyer*, ruling on Los Angeles deployment (September 2, 2025); *NBC Washington*, Guard to stay on D.C. streets through 2026; *Washington Times* and *Washington Examiner*, judge rules deployment unlawful (November 2025); *Niskanen Center*, D.C. deployment impact (June 2026); *Washington Post–Schar School Poll*, George Mason University (August 2025); *Defense Department* D.C. deployment cost estimate to Congress (August 4, 2026); 10 U.S.C. § 12406 (National Guard federalization authority); *PBS NewsHour*, Trump hints at deployment in U.S. cities; *NPR*, District Court ruling on the claimed Los Angeles “rebellion” (December 2025); *U.S. Supreme Court*, stay of Chicago deployment (December 2025); *NOTICE Act*, S. 3449, and *Insurrection Act of 2025*, H.R. 4076, 119th Congress; *Insurrection Act of 1807* (10 U.S.C. §§ 251–255); *Act of March 1, 1889* (D.C. Code § 49-409); *Cato Institute*, *Insurrection Act threat should be disavowed* (January 2026); *Mary McCord*, *Georgetown Law*, on *Insurrection Act reform*; *Gen. James Mattis* and *Gen. Mark Milley*, public statements on domestic military use; *Rosa Brooks*, *Georgetown Law*, on *Posse Comitatus*; *Robb Willer*, *Stanford*, on moral reframing (2017); *Levitsky and Ziblatt*, *How Democracies Die* (2018)

Appeal to Our Crewmates: This “Failure Is Not an Option” briefing is one of a series by Astronauts For America, distilling our “America, We Have a Problem!” series briefings into cause factors and actionable recommendations. We are not constitutional scholars; we defer to experts and use primary sources: court decisions, congressional records, peer-reviewed scholarship and news reporting rather than commentary or opinion. Please use the “Contact Us” feature on our website to tell us what we can do to help our democracy keep faith with our American ideals.