



Naming Distraction

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In recent weeks, I have noted the increasing tendency of political pundits and media personalities to refer to certain actions from the federal government as “distractions.” They point to one issue that seems to be their only concern while discounting the impact of other actions as trivial attempts at attention-getting that don’t warrant much concern. The seemingly never-ending waves of executive action and chaotic communication strategy can be overwhelming and lead to wide-scale apathy or resignation. Yet, the idea that the federal government, especially the military, overriding local government only results in a distraction seems absurd and myopic.

Media personalities have compared the deployment of the National Guard in Washington, DC to similar efforts in Los Angeles. Both are major US cities led by women of African descent. Ironically, LA and DC currently enjoy record low crime rates despite the baseless rationale given for the deployment. The major difference between the two cities is that one, in the District of Columbia, lacks a state government and has been forced to rely on the federal government for functions that Los Angeles can turn to California’s state legislative and executive branches to perform. Interestingly, the Attorney General of the District of Columbia does not share the “distraction” viewpoint and has sued the federal government.

Yes, there have been reports of the remnant of the National Guard and military in California sitting around

with nothing to do. Yet, that only partially describes the impact of these deployments. Members of marginalized communities experience the brunt of these so-called efforts at distraction. Reports of harassment of Black and Brown people can be found from media who take government overreach seriously regardless of motives or tangential impact. Just this week, the governor of my state has responded affirmatively to the administration's request to send 150 members of the Ohio National Guard to Washington. I'm sure those individuals, who will need to leave their families, homes, and livelihoods for an indeterminate amount of time would not consider this a distraction. I have attempted to call the governor's office to no avail as no one answers and the voicemail is full—of messages from Ohioans who do not consider this action a distraction, I am sure.

Perhaps the most insidious aspect of these deployments is the normalization of the United States military being deployed internally in a move far too similar to a foreign nation attempting to overcome a sovereign government. For all their faults and deep failings, the authors of the Constitution structured a divided system of government both functionally (legislative, judicial, and executive) and geographically (local, state, and federal). Local and state governments can request federal assistance but the federal government cannot lawfully override their sovereignty.

There has been no indication that the local law enforcement, who are trained for public safety in a way that National Guard and military members are not, are understaffed or failing their assignment. Again, crime rates have reached historic lows. Further, when the mayor sought the assistance of neighboring National Guards on January 6, 2021, they waited in vain for an order from the federal government when both local and federal police were overwhelmed with an insurrectionist mob besieging the Capitol. The selective use of executive power is not a distraction but a consistent characteristic of an administration using its power for political purposes. From that, in whatever form, we the people cannot afford to be distracted.

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