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## Trump always wanted his own police force. Portland's just his excuse to use it.

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- Trump's always thought of federal law enforcement agents as the president's own toy soldiers.
- He's sent them to Portland to arrest protesters, and now he's threatening to send them to other cities with Democratic mayors and governors.
- Trump's actions might be unconstitutional, but they're not illegal.
- A slew of post-9/11 laws and regulations have placed a dangerous amount of authority in the executive branch. Trump's just taking advantage of the system that was handed to him.
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President Trump's favorite words are "strong" and "powerful."

Even dating back to the 1990s, he used them to praise the Communist Chinese government's 1989 massacre of thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square as a demonstration of "the power of strength."

As president it's become even more clear the words make up his measure of leadership. It's why he admires dictators and authoritarians, and why he has long encouraged US law enforcement to not worry so much about namby-pamby civil liberties and just get on with the business of letting the people know who's boss.

And it's why his use of federal agents to police the streets of Portland is the natural progression to what he views as the power of the presidency.

His threats to do the same to Chicago, Milwaukee, and other cities run by "liberal Democrats" prove Trump sees this as his best opportunity to demonstrate his "power of strength," just in time for campaign season.

Portland is just Trump's excuse to do what he's always wanted

Vandalism of federal buildings in Portland is the ostensible reason given for the unnerving presence of fatigue-clad federal agents, wearing no badges and some not even identifying which agency they represent, arresting people in unmarked vans and deploying non-lethal — but seriously painful — crowd control measures like tear gas and rubber bullets.

Trump figured if the local authorities won't put the boot down, he could order the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) to take back the streets surrounding federal buildings. He does have the authority to do that under the Insurrection Act of 1807.

Now Trump's found the moment to put his own soldiers on the ground in cities that will once again vote overwhelmingly against him come November.

He's wanted to do this for a while. Trump wasn't even in office for a week in 2017 before he was threatening to "send in the feds" to quell Chicago's street violence.

He reversed the Obama administration's directive to stop handing over surplus military equipment — including tanks and grenade launchers — to local police departments simply because they asked for them.

And now DHS has authorized its agents to do intelligence gathering on protesters. A former Bush administration official told the Washington Post, "Trump is morphing DHS into his private little rogue, secret army."

Just as the police have grown militarized, both in terms of the availability of weapons of war and seeing themselves as warriors rather than guardians, so too has the Border Patrol — which along with the US Marshals and the DHS — has been the primary agency acting as Trump's secret police force.

Post-9/11 mission creep gave Trump the tools that no president should have

James Tomscheck, the Border Patrol's former head of internal affairs, told The New York Times in 2016 that after 9/11, agents "were assured they were not law enforcement but part of a military agency tasked with securing the border ... They came to believe they were not subject to the same constraints as the rest of law enforcement in the United States."

It's disturbing enough (as it should be for Trump supporters terrified by the supposed tyranny of mask requirements) that a federal secret police force is snatching people off the streets. The fact that it's the Border Patrol demonstrates the Homeland Security mission creep that has afforded Trump the powers that no president should have.

But there's also powers the federal government has granted itself for decades that allow Trump to impose his will on his hated cities.

Since 1953, the Department of Justice's regulations give the Border Patrol jurisdiction within 100 miles of America's borders, including the oceans.

That's how Portland, even though it's about 285 miles from the Canadian border and about 1,160 miles from the Mexican border, ends up in Border Patrol territory. The so-called "100 mile zone" puts approximately 200 million people, or about two-thirds of the entire US population, under Border Patrol authority in a Consti

That's why even though Trump's actions might be unconstitutional, as some legal experts have argued, they're not technically illegal. And besides, he had promised the Border Patrol — whose union was an early major backer of his 2016 campaign — that he'd take the handcuffs off them. The handcuffs, of course, are due process and forbidding excessive force.

Governors and mayors could sue to prevent federal agents from trying to enforce local laws, but barring a judge issuing an injunction, Trump could continue to use his secret police to run roughshod over cities. It's a little late to make major changes now, but once Trump has vacated the White House, we might as a country stand to take a closer look at how much power we place in the executive branch.

As Paul Matzko wrote for the libertarian-leaning Cato Institute's blog: "CBP's nascent role as a cut-rate secret police force that operates at the discretion of the executive branch is merely one manifestation of the creeping, bi-partisan paramilitarization of the federal government."

In the meantime, Trump will use his toy soldiers for political purposes. Just as he did when he domestically deployed the military to theatrically "guard" the Southern border.

Trump's model for governance is the autocratic strongman. He's never been shy about letting us know that. Now he's using the powers we've handed the presidents over the past half-century to show us what his idea of a "strong, powerful" government looks like in practice.