

Trump could use Insurrection Act to quell protests; here's what that means

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President Donald Trump walks from the White House through Lafayette Park to visit St. John's Church Monday, June 1, 2020, in Washington D.C. The church was damaged by fires during protests near the White House. Photo by Patrick Semansky for the Associated Press.

As protests sparked by the death of George Floyd entered their seventh night, President Trump made a statement June 1 from the White House. Trump vowed to end "the riots and lawlessness." To do so, Trump said he would deploy the U.S. military to states if they can't manage riots on their own. That could be accomplished with a 200-year-old law called the Insurrection Act. Here's what the law involves.

Key Facts

- The Insurrection Act was signed into law by President Thomas Jefferson in 1807. It gives the president the ability to deploy the military to squash civil disorder, rebellion or insurrection within the U.S.
- The Act was last used to suppress the 1992 Los Angeles riots. They took place after the acquittal of white police officers in the savage beating of Rodney King, a black man. The

beating was caught on video. California's governor asked President George H.W. Bush for federal assistance. Bush invoked the Insurrection Act, but the riots quieted before federal troops were deployed.

- Governors have the ability to ask the federal government to send in troops to assist with squashing civil unrest. None yet have done so. Instead, they have opted to rely on local law enforcement and National Guard troops, which are Army and Air Force reserves.
- A section of the act states that a president can deploy troops without a direct request. The president can do so in cases of rebellion or "unlawful assemblages" that make it impractical to enforce the law in a normal fashion.
- Another law that works in tandem with the Insurrection Act is the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878. In most cases, Posse Comitatus prohibits military forces from being sent to U.S. states for use as law enforcement. The Insurrection Act is an exception to Posse Comitatus.
- In order to deploy troops without a governor's go-ahead, Trump would have to issue a proclamation. He would have to order "insurgents" to disperse and go home within a limited timeframe, according to NBC.

Chief critics

New York Governor Andrew Cuomo told CNN on June 1 that he would say "thanks, but no thanks" to the federal government's offer to send in troops. Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker told the network, "I reject the notion that the federal government can send troops into the state of Illinois."

Key Background

The Insurrection Act was used several times in the 20th century. President Dwight D. Eisenhower used it to protect the Little Rock Nine in 1957. A federal court ordered that nine black students be allowed to attend Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Eisenhower used the Insurrection Act against the wishes of the governor of Arkansas to enforce that court order.

Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson followed the precedent set by Little Rock to deal with resistance to court-ordered desegregation in several Southern states. Johnson used it again during the 1968 riots sparked by the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. by a white man. Johnson acted after the mayor of Washington, D.C., and the governors of Illinois and Maryland requested assistance.

In an earlier press briefing with reporters on June 1, Kayleigh McEnany, White House press secretary, left open the possibility of Trump invoking the Insurrection Act. She said, "It's one of the tools available."

Trump's speech took place while protesters were being cleared by military police with tear gas and flashbang stun grenades outside nearby St. John's Church. The historic church is where presidents attend services. It was damaged by fire during protests on May 31.

After his address, Trump walked outside the White House gates. He was accompanied by an entourage that included Attorney General William Barr, McEnany and daughter Ivanka Trump. They crossed Lafayette Park to visit St. John's. Once there, he posed for pictures outside holding up a Bible, and departed shortly thereafter.

Quiz

- 1 Which paragraph from the section "Key Facts" BEST explains a conflict to the Insurrection Act?
- (A) The Insurrection Act was signed into law by President Thomas Jefferson in 1807. It gives the president the ability to deploy the military to squash civil disorder, rebellion or insurrection within the U.S.
 - (B) Governors have the ability to ask the federal government to send in troops to assist with squashing civil unrest. None yet have done so. Instead, they have opted to rely on local law enforcement and National Guard troops, which are Army and Air Force reserves.
 - (C) A section of the act states that a president can deploy troops without a direct request. The president can do so in cases of rebellion or "unlawful assemblages" that make it impractical to enforce the law in a normal fashion.
 - (D) Another law that works in tandem with the Insurrection Act is the Posse Comitatus Act of 1878. In most cases, Posse Comitatus prohibits military forces from being sent to U.S. states for use as law enforcement. The Insurrection Act is an exception to Posse Comitatus.
- 2 Which section of the article BEST explains why the Insurrection Act has been invoked in the past?
- (A) Introduction [paragraph 1]
 - (B) "Key Facts"
 - (C) "Chief Critics"
 - (D) "Key Background"
- 3 What is the MAIN reason the author includes the section "Chief Critics"?
- (A) to illustrate that some governors will resist President Trump's efforts to deploy U.S. troops in response to protests
 - (B) to illustrate that New York and Illinois are the states most affected by the protests
 - (C) to compare the responses of various governors in support of and against President Trump's idea to invoke the Insurrection Act
 - (D) to contrast the responses of the governors of New York and Illinois to President Trump's idea to invoke the Insurrection Act
- 4 What is one reason the author includes information about the Little Rock Nine?
- (A) to provide an example of a time when a state governor requested federal military assistance
 - (B) to describe the most recent historical use of the Insurrection Act
 - (C) to provide an example of a time when federal troops were deployed against a governor's wishes
 - (D) to describe the reason the Insurrection Act was created