

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES ON DOMESTIC DEPLOYMENT OF THE NATIONAL GUARD

Deploying the Guard on U.S. soil is a decision that should always be made judiciously. We hope that these principles help decisionmakers to ensure that domestic missions are appropriate, non-politicized, and in keeping with what's best for our nation, our states, and the Guard.

Deploying the Guard with Due Deliberation

We are a group of retired high-ranking civilian and military leaders of the U.S. Armed Forces and the National Guard. We write out of concern about increasing domestic deployment of the National Guard for nontraditional, politicized missions that substantially diverge from traditional domestic National Guard functions, such as providing assistance during natural and manmade disasters or responding to violent civil unrest. The men and women of the National Guard stand ready and willing to serve their communities. We believe that it is vital that they be adequately prepared for missions, they maintain their readiness for military operations, and that their assigned missions should never put the public trust or the reputation of the men and women of the National Guard at issue.

Deploying the Guard on U.S. soil can be a difficult decision. It is a decision most often made by state and territorial governors, who serve as the commanders-in-chief of their National Guard units unless they are put under federal command. That decision should always be made judiciously, in consideration of what is best for the nation, the states, and the Guard.

Based on our experience, we offer a set of principles, which we hope will help both state and federal decisionmakers to evaluate the appropriateness of domestic National Guard missions. These principles are neither new nor novel, and we doubt that any of them will come as a surprise to the highly capable individuals who currently serve as both civilian and military leaders of the National Guard. Nonetheless, we believe that it is important to articulate these principles to help elected officials, civil society, and the broader U.S. public to better understand decisions to deploy the National Guard, particularly as nontraditional domestic deployments grow more common and are appropriately subject to greater public scrutiny.

Mission Preparedness

A paramount consideration for any use of the National Guard is whether the Guard members in question have everything they require to accomplish the mission. Elements of preparedness include:

- **Providing sufficient training, equipment, and resources.**¹ No Guard member should be deployed without training specific to the function that they will be asked to fulfill or in the absence of any other support that they need to complete their mission.
- **Articulating a clear mission and timeline.** A well-defined objective is necessary to adequately prepare for a mission and ensure its success. National Guard members should have a clear understanding of the scope of the mission and the expected time needed to accomplish it to the greatest extent possible. Guard leaders should agree upon key indicators of mission completion before deploying the National Guard.
- **Establishing a clear chain of command.** National Guard units can operate in multiple different statuses, under state or federal command, and in support of other first responders or law enforcement agencies. Guard members should not be deployed without clarity on the chain of command.
- **Articulating clear and specific rules for the use of force.** National Guard members should always be fully familiar with and trained on the applicable rules for the use of force.
- **Deploying in support of first responders.** In a domestic emergency, local first responders or law enforcement professionals typically have the best understanding of the situation on the ground. National Guard units should therefore almost always serve in a supporting role to local authorities and not in a role where they may be working at cross-purposes. Historically, the rare appropriate exceptions have been to protect individuals' constitutional rights from state violence, such as when the Alabama National Guard was federalized in 1965 to protect those marching for civil rights from Selma to Montgomery.²
- **Deploying as a unit.** Members of the National Guard are trained and organized as units. While deploying entire units and not individual Guard members is not always practical, that approach should be followed whenever possible to avoid confusion and maximize preparedness.

¹ The National Guard typically receives funding from the federal government to train as a reserve component. Training and equipment provided by and through the National Guard Bureau may be relevant to state-led missions, but the Bureau provides those resources to ensure that Guard units are prepared for their core federal responsibilities, so such training may not be sufficient for every type of mission state.

² Weeks earlier, in the event known as "Bloody Sunday," state troopers and deputized civilians had brutally attacked unarmed protestors attempting the same march.

Overall Readiness

When disaster strikes, at home or abroad, it is essential that the National Guard be ready to respond. A Guard unit may have the requisite training and resources for a mission, but if the mission is not a genuine emergency threatening lives and property, then deploying the National Guard may detract from the Guard's overall capacity to address more serious matters. Most Guard members have families and civilian lives that they must put on hold when deployed, as well as employers whose sacrifice becomes more acute with Guard members' prolonged absence. Excessive or inappropriate deployments can seriously impair retention and exacerbate recruitment shortfalls within the National Guard. Elements of readiness include:

- **Using the National Guard as a last resort.** If a situation can be handled by other appropriate authorities without National Guard involvement, then the Guard should generally be reserved for times when there is a greater need.
- **Focusing on core competencies of the National Guard.** An exception to using the National Guard as a last resort is that some missions may improve readiness by reinforcing core skills. For example, the National Guard is routinely called upon to assist with natural disasters; to the extent that capacity allows, responding to smaller-scale problems of a similar nature may serve as a useful training exercise. One-off, nontraditional missions are likely to require different skills than traditional missions, and preparing and deploying for these missions may detract from overall readiness by taking away time that could be spent training for core Guard functions.

Public Trust

The National Guard exists to serve the nation and the states; it should never be associated with a political cause or faction. Americans trust that when you call out the National Guard, you call out America and that when the National Guard arrives, their situation will improve. No deployment of the National Guard should break that trust. Indeed, were that trust to erode, it would dramatically weaken the ability of the Guard to respond to domestic emergencies. The National Guard is most effective, both at home and abroad, when there is unshakeable trust in the deployment of the National Guard. Elements of public trust include:

- **Avoiding politics and political controversy.** Decisions to deploy the National Guard should never be made to further a political agenda or to advance a perspective on a policy issue that is the subject of public debate. The presence of political controversy should, in fact, weigh against any decision to deploy the National Guard.
- **Exercising great caution around elections.** There is no more vital expression of American democracy than voting in an election. National Guard involvement in and around election administration should be rare, limited in scope, and in strict compliance with state and federal election laws. The National Guard should never be involved in an election in a manner that risks interfering with the will of the people or undermining public trust in the results.
- **Avoiding putting the National Guard into conflict with any other lawful authority.** Guard members should almost never be put into a position where their presence is opposed by state and local governments, federal law enforcement, or other responsible civilian authorities. At worst, this would escalate conflicts that should be resolved through the political process. One of the rare historical exceptions to this principle was the federalization of the Alabama National Guard to protect African American students enrolling in the previously-segregated University of Alabama,³ an extreme circumstance in which Guard intervention was necessary to protect lives and safeguard constitutional rights. Similarly contentious deployments should be held to the same standard.
- **Mitigating harm to the maximum extent possible.** In any politically fraught situation in which it becomes necessary to deploy the National Guard, all possible steps should be taken to de-escalate, avoid embroiling the National Guard in political conflict, and avoid influencing elections.
- **Rejecting private funding for National Guard support.** To avoid any appearance that the National Guard works for anyone except the American public, no National Guard deployment should be directly or indirectly paid for with private funds.

³ This culminated in the event known as the "Stand in the Schoolhouse Door," in which a Guard general had to order Alabama Governor George Wallace, who was blocking the door of the auditorium where the students sought to enroll, to step aside. At other times, governors attempted to use the National Guard to prevent African American students from enrolling in segregated schools; both Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy federalized state Guard members deployed for this purpose and ordered them to stand down.

We owe it to the men and women of the National Guard to make wise decisions about how we will draw upon their service — and we owe it to each other as Americans. We hope that these principles will help inform those decisions about the appropriate use of the National Guard. A stronger National Guard strengthens our national security and our national resilience. We trust that all of our elected leaders will have the strength, wisdom, and courage to not take that for granted.

General Joseph Lengyel (Ret.)

28th Chief of the National Guard Bureau

General Craig McKinley (Ret.)

26th Chief of the National Guard Bureau

Admiral Thad Allen (Ret.)

23rd Commandant of the Coast Guard

Major General Daryl Bohac (Ret.)

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General George Casey (Ret.)

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Count Every Hero is a nonpartisan initiative of retired admirals and generals and former service secretaries whose work focuses on promoting the importance of a strong democracy to national security; promoting civic literacy and civic participation; and protecting the voting rights of active-duty service members, veterans, and their families. The National Guard Working Group is a group of retired National Guard leaders convened by Count Every Hero in 2023, and committed to supporting current National Guard leaders, elected officials, and others in keeping the National Guard a strong, ready, and trusted military force in the service of all Americans.