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## What country is this?

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To: clerk.cps@lacity.org

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**Good afternoon,**

I served this country believing in the Constitution. I put on the uniform because I believed in accountability, justice, and the idea that power—especially government power—should never go unchecked. I believed, maybe naively, that if the time ever came when our democracy was under assault, our systems would respond with integrity.

But today, as I watch National Guard troops march through Los Angeles streets in tactical gear, armored vehicles parked where buses should be, and immigrant families hunted down in white vans like fugitives, I know we've crossed a line. And the America I thought I served is nowhere in sight.

I hoped that this level of force would be reserved for rooting out those who threatened our democracy—**the true insurrectionists**, the ones who attacked our Capitol, who continue to deny the outcome of elections, who worship power over principle. But instead, **we've turned this force inward**, against the most vulnerable: immigrants, protestors, labor leaders, the poor.

This is not law enforcement. It's **conditioning**—getting us used to the sight of militarized power in our cities, testing how much fear the public can tolerate before silence becomes the default. **It's preparation**, plain and simple, for broader domestic control under the guise of "order."

I've talked about this for years. I've written about the dangers of a police system obsessed with overtime, pensions, and impunity. I've warned about ICE operating like a paramilitary agency, exploiting legal gray zones to bypass courts and disappear people. I've said that real service—whether in the military or as a civil servant—should begin with humility, not a badge or a gun or a paycheck.

And now, just like so many veterans who came before me, I feel like I was used. Like I served something that changed its face once I came home.

Let's be honest: the National Guard deployed to Los Angeles **will not back down from a protester. They will advance.** They are not trained to ask questions or deescalate. They are soldiers. They follow federal orders. And when provoked, when challenged, or when one of their own is hurt, they will respond like a military force is trained to respond: with overwhelming, potentially lethal force.

I don't blame the individual soldiers. I blame the people who sent them. I blame the corrupted bureaucracy. I blame the cowardice of politicians who say they support "freedom" while allowing the Constitution to be trampled under combat boots.

Governor Newsom and the Los Angeles City Council must warn the public that these troops are not police. They are not accountable to the people of California now that he has been taken out of command. They are federal assets, operating under the direction of a man who has shown nothing but contempt for the rule of law. Yet he is our legally elected president with immunity and the supremacy clause as his friend.

**President Trump—who avoided military service with bone spurs—is now using the military to punish civilians.**

The image of American troops marching through immigrant neighborhoods with batons and rifles is something we used to associate with authoritarian regimes. Now it's home. Watching the 1968 documentary on the Democratic National convention, at that time they wanted to cancel it because of riot police, they called it a "police state", I wonder what they'd say about today events and many of you can probably answer that from memory.

What's worse is that these tactics are being tested on immigrants first because they are the easiest to silence. But make no mistake—**this kind of force will not stay confined to immigration raids.** It will be used against climate activists, abortion rights defenders, labor organizers, journalists, students, and anyone else who steps out of line. This is how it always begins: with "exceptions."

The veterans I served with didn't sign up for this. Our communities didn't vote for this. And yet here we are—**living through a quiet normalization of martial control.**

But I will keep speaking. I will not be silent while white vans abduct fathers. I will not look away when National Guard troops patrol our streets like it's a war zone, and I will not stop wondering if every immigrant I see here may one day be disappeared the same way as many have already. I will not accept a version of America where being undocumented makes you expendable, and being powerful makes you untouchable.

We were supposed to be a nation of laws. That promise has been broken. And if we don't fix it now, **we'll lose more than just public trust—we'll lose the country we thought we had.**

**Thanks again for your service,**

**God Bless the United States of America**

**Steven Berry**

Sent from my iPhone

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