



Written by [John and Nisha Whitehead](#) on May 7, 2025

Martial Law Disguised as Law and Order: The Oldest Trick in the Authoritarian Playbook

"A standing military force, with an overgrown Executive will not long be safe companions to liberty." — James Madison

We are being frog-marched into tyranny at the end of a loaded gun. Or rather, hundreds of thousands of loaded guns.

Let's not mince words: President [Trump's April 28 executive order](#) is the oldest trick in the authoritarian playbook: martial law masquerading as law and order.

Officially titled "[Strengthening and Unleashing America's Law Enforcement to Pursue Criminals and Protect Innocent Citizens](#)," this order is a "heil Hitler" wrapped in the goosestepping, despotic trappings of national security.

Don't be fooled by Trump's tough-on-crime rhetoric, cloaked in patriotic language and the promise of safety.

This is the language of every strongman who's ever ruled by force.

The White House claims the order will "[empower state and local law enforcement to relentlessly pursue criminals and protect American communities](#)." But under this administration, "criminal" increasingly includes anyone who dares to exercise their constitutional rights.

The order doesn't merely expand policing — it institutionalizes repression.

It sets us squarely on the road to martial law.

If allowed to stand, Trump's executive order completes our shift from a nation of laws — where even the least among us had the right to due process — to a nation of enforcers: vigilantes with badges who treat "we the people" as suspects and subordinates.

[Without invoking the Insurrection Act](#) or deploying active-duty military forces, Trump has accelerated the transformation of domestic police into his own paramilitary force.

With the [stroke of his presidential pen](#), he has laid the groundwork for a stealth version of martial law by:

- Expanding police powers and legal protections;
- Authorizing the DOJ to defend officers accused of civil rights violations;
- Increasing the transfer of military equipment to local police;
- Shielding law enforcement from judicial oversight;
- Prioritizing law enforcement protection over civil liberties;
- Embedding DHS and federal agents more deeply into local policing.



John Whitehead
John Whitehead



Written by [John and Nisha Whitehead](#) on May 7, 2025

All of this has occurred without congressional debate, judicial review, or constitutional scrutiny.

For years, we have watched as the government transformed local law enforcement into extensions of the military: outfitted with military hardware and trained in battlefield tactics.

However, this executive order goes one step further — creating not just a *de facto* standing army but *Trump's own army*: loyal not to the Constitution or the people, but to the president.

This is the very danger the Founders feared: a militarized police force answerable to a powerful executive, operating outside the bounds of the law.

This is martial law without a declaration.

Law enforcement today is equipped like the military, trained in battlefield tactics, and given broad discretion over who to target and how to respond. But these are not soldiers bound by the laws of war. They are civilian enforcers, wielding unchecked power with minimal oversight.

And they are everywhere.

Armored vehicles on neighborhood streets. Flashbang raids on family homes. Riot police in small towns. SWAT-style teams deployed by federal agencies. Drones overhead. Mass surveillance below.

We are fast approaching a reality where constitutional rights exist in name only.

In practice, we are ruled by a quasi-military bureaucracy empowered to:

- Detain without trial;
- Punish political dissent;
- Seize property under civil asset forfeiture;
- Classify critics as extremists or terrorists;
- Conduct mass surveillance on the populace;
- Raid homes in the name of “public safety”;
- Use deadly force at the slightest provocation.

In other words, we've got freedom in name only.

It's the same scenario nationwide: in big cities and small towns alike, militarized “warrior” cops — hyped up on power — ride roughshod over individual rights by exercising almost absolute discretion over who is a threat, what constitutes resistance, and how harshly they can deal with the citizens they were appointed to “serve and protect.”

This nationwide epidemic of court-sanctioned police violence has already ensured that unarmed Americans — many of them mentally ill, elderly, disabled, or simply noncompliant — will continue to die at the hands of militarized police.

From individuals shot for holding garden hoses, to those killed after calling 911 for help, these tragedies underscore a chilling truth: in a police state, the only truly “safe” person is one who offers no resistance at all.

These killings are the inevitable result of a system that rewards vigilante aggression by warrior cops and punishes accountability.

These so-called warrior cops, [trained to act as judge, jury and executioner](#), increasingly outnumber those who still honor their oath to uphold the Constitution and serve the public.

Now, under the cover of executive orders and nationalist rhetoric, that warrior mentality is being



Written by [John and Nisha Whitehead](#) on May 7, 2025

redirected toward a more dangerous mission: silencing political dissent.

Emboldened by Trump's call to reopen Alcatraz and target so-called "[homegrown](#)" threats, these foot soldiers of the police state are no longer going to be tasked with enforcing the law — they will be deployed to enforce political obedience.

This is not a theory. It is a reality unfolding before our eyes.

We are living in a creeping state of undeclared martial law.

The militarization of police and federal agencies over recent decades has only accelerated the timeline toward authoritarianism.

This is how freedom ends — not with a loud decree, but with the quiet, calculated erosion of every principle we once held sacred.

We've come full circle — from resisting British redcoats to submitting to American forces with the same disdain for liberty.

Our constitutional foundation is crumbling, and with it, any illusion that those in power still serve the public good.

Congress, for its part, has abdicated its role as a constitutional check on executive power — passing sweeping authorizations with little scrutiny and failing to rein in executive overreach. The courts, too, have in the past sanctioned many of these abuses in the name of national security, public order, or qualified immunity. Instead of acting as constitutional safeguards, these institutions have largely become rubber stamps.

Indeed, the president, Congress, the courts, and the police have come to embody the very abuse the Founders fought to resist. Only now are the courts beginning to show glimmers of allegiance to the Constitution.

This is not about partisanship. This is about power without restraint.

As tempting as it is to place full blame on Trump for this full-throttle shift into martial law, he is not the architect of this police state. He is its most shameless enabler — a useful frontman for the Deep State in its ongoing war on the American people.

As we warn in [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) and [A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State](#), we are sliding fast down a slippery slope to a Constitution-free America.

We ignore these signs at our peril.

About John & Nisha Whitehead:

Constitutional attorney and author John W. Whitehead is founder and president of The Rutherford Institute. His latest books [The Erik Blair Diaries](#) and [Battlefield America: The War on the American People](#) are available at www.amazon.com. Whitehead can be contacted at johnw@rutherford.org. Nisha Whitehead is the Executive Director of The Rutherford Institute. Information about The Rutherford Institute is available at www.rutherford.org.



Subscribe to the New American

Get exclusive digital access to the most informative,
non-partisan truthful news source for patriotic Americans!

Discover a refreshing blend of time-honored values, principles and insightful perspectives within the pages of "The New American" magazine. Delve into a world where tradition is the foundation, and exploration knows no bounds.

From politics and finance to foreign affairs, environment, culture, and technology, we bring you an unparalleled array of topics that matter most.



Subscribe

What's Included?

- 24 Issues Per Year
- Optional Print Edition
- Digital Edition Access
- Exclusive Subscriber Content
- Audio provided for all articles
- Unlimited access to past issues
- Coming Soon! Ad FREE
- 60-Day money back guarantee!
- Cancel anytime.