

COVID-19: Restoring Law and Order to the New York City Subway System

by Phillip W. Weiss

One positive result of the COVID-19 crisis is that it has called attention to the fact that the New York City subway system is both a sewer and a base of operations for a large and entrenched criminal element that preys on the subway-riding public. Regarding the latter, the continued existence of a criminal element in the subway constitutes a direct threat to public safety. Action is needed to eliminate that threat. Further delays in action will only make the situation worse and put the entire city and the nation more at risk. Accordingly, the city council must ask the federal government to officially designate the New York City subway system a combat zone (which de facto it already is) and deploy whatever federal troops and federal law enforcement personnel are necessary to combat the criminal element that is embedded in the subway system. As the largest urban mass transit system in the United States, and one that serves as a gateway to the rest of the nation, the federal government has a vested interest in ensuring that the New York City subway is operated efficiently and in accordance with federal security and public safety guidelines.

Restoring law and order to the New York City subway system will require much more than just removing vagrants. If that is all that was needed, then sending in a cohort of social workers armed with some money and food to induce the vagrants to leave would suffice. However, that initiative, commendable

though it is, fails to target the population of hustlers, panhandlers, scam artists, pickpockets, fare-evaders, and squatters for whom the subway is a base of operation from which to engage in illicit activities. For these criminals, the subway is a source of income. They will not give up the subway without a fight. The only way they will be neutralized and dislodged is through military action.

This is not an overstatement of the problem. The logistical challenge alone makes it obvious that only a military operation will succeed. The subway is an immense system with hundreds of miles of track and hundreds of stations. The system contains thousands of train cars. Hence the system affords the criminal element an almost limitless number of places in which to evade capture.

These criminals are resourceful. They are organized. They are predators. Further, they are committed to defending what they consider to be their turf. It must be remembered that for many years the government has permitted this criminal element to operate openly and with impunity. Thus, any reversal in policy will meet with resistance. The police force lacks the resources and firepower to flush out and permanently rid the subways of these criminals. Only the military has the fire power and logistical resources needed to accomplish that objective.

A full-scale operation would require a massive deployment of troops. Captured criminals would be treated as prisoners of war pursuant to military law and be placed in protective custody while awaiting administrative legal action. After the conclusion of the military operation, a robust military presence would follow, the purpose of which would be to deter the criminal element from reemerging.

Simultaneously, the federal government would direct the Department of Homeland Security to initiate measures to upgrade security throughout the entire New York City subway system. Such measures could include the installation of security cameras in every subway car, station, and tunnel; use of robots to patrol the subways; and the screening of all persons prior to entering the subway system.

Use of federal military forces to enforce law and restore order is not unprecedented. In the nineteenth century, the US Government deployed federal troops to enforce the law as it related to the status of Native Americans. In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln ordered the army to suppress a domestic insurrection. In 1894, President Grover Cleveland mobilized federal troops to quell the Pullman strike. In 1932, President Herbert Hoover ordered the army, under the command of General Douglas MacArthur, to disperse the Bonus March. During World War Two, President Franklin D. Roosevelt ordered the army to detain American citizens of Japanese, Italian, and German descent. In 1957, President Dwight D. Eisenhower deployed the army to Arkansas to enforce a federal order to desegregate the public schools. In 1970, President Richard M. Nixon ordered federal troops to operate the post office during a labor dispute. In 2018, President Donald J. Trump ordered federal troops to help secure the nation's southern border.

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DEATH ON THE SUBWAY

Two bodies found on trains within 12 hours

The homeless crisis on the subway amid the coronavirus outbreak went from grim to unbearable over the weekend when the bodies of two vagrants were found in separate trains. Said one veteran journalist, "It's afraid to ride... The trains are overwhelmed with homeless and you never know what's going to happen."

FULL COVID-19 COVERAGE PAGES 2-7

OUTBREAK

Suicide doc 'brain alter'

CRIMINAL 'UNDERGROUND'
 Crime soars on mugway trains as ridership (and busts) plunge

Cuo's clean-train order

It's a smaller world after all

Test-nixed teach dies

PROBLEM: A subway train car is shown with a person lying on the floor, partially obscured by a shopping cart. The train interior is visible with metal poles and seats.

