

Trump's disturbing plans

BELIEVE HIM

ANALYSIS Donald Trump has described at length the dangerous and disturbing actions he says he will take if he wins the presidency.

His rallies offer a steady stream of such promises and threats — things like prosecuting political opponents and using the military against US citizens. These statements are so outrageous and outlandish, so openly in conflict with the norms and values of American democracy that many find them hard to regard as anything but empty bluster.

We have two words for American voters: Believe him.

The record shows that Mr. Trump often pursues his stated goals, regardless of how plainly they lack legal or moral grounding. The record further shows that many of his most reckless efforts in his first administration were stymied only because of others in his administration who blocked, delayed, or watered down his aims to ensure that he could not put himself above the law or the country. Mr. Trump has learned from that experience to surround himself with supplicants who would instead obey his wishes and bring his words and ideas to life even if they contradict facts, the public interest, or the Constitution.

For this reason, Americans would be wise to see this language as a genuine threat, not simply Mr. Trump on a tangent. We should take the painful step of imagining America were his plans and promises to come to pass, to imagine the impacts to our culture, to our economy, to our security, to our shared commitment to the rule of law.

The promises Mr. Trump made during his first presidential campaign, in 2016, turned out to be a pretty good road map of the policies and priorities he pursued as president. Today, he says he is ready to deploy the military against his political opponents. He says that he will instruct the Justice Department to prosecute critics. He says that he will mobilize the National Guard to deport immigrants, that he is ready to blow Iranian cities to smithereens, that he will allow vigilante violence as a solution to crime in America. Americans should believe him.

A silhouette of Donald Trump, former president of the United States, is seen making a speech while wearing a 'Make America Great Again' hat.

● NYT



Donald Trump appears in court for his hush money trial at Manhattan Criminal Court in New York City on May 30, 2024. The former president was convicted of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in the first of his criminal cases to go to trial.

● DAVE SANDERS/NYT

Trump says he will use Justice Department to punish people he doesn't like. Believe him.

In his own words

"Wouldn't it be terrible to throw the president's wife and the former secretary of state, think of it, the former secretary of state, but the president's wife, into jail? Wouldn't that be a terrible thing? But they want to do it. It's a terrible, terrible path that they're leading us to. And it's very possible that it's going to have to happen to them."

After his conviction on 34 felony charges in New York in May, Mr. Trump, in an interview with Newsmax, escalated his threats to use the Justice Department to go after his political enemies.

Why you should believe him

As president, Mr. Trump repeatedly sought to use the power of govern-

ment to punish his political opponents.

He was open about trying to get other countries to do his bidding — his attempt to get Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden led to his first impeachment in 2019. Behind the scenes, he was relentless in trying to get his attorneys general and the IRS to investigate people he thought had wronged him, including Hillary Clinton, his former rival; John Kerry, a former secretary of state; his former FBI director, James Comey; and Andrew McCabe, Mr. Comey's deputy. None of these efforts led to any charges being filed, but if he is re-elected, Mr. Trump will continue trying to use the Justice Department to harass his enemies.

After the Watergate scandal in the 1970s, the Justice Department established policies aimed at insulating its decision-making from White House pressure, and during Mr. Trump's presidency, many senior Justice officials honored that policy and resisted his demands. But rules can be rewritten, and Mr. Trump has made clear that he intends to pick officials who will take orders from the Oval Office. According to NPR, during the current campaign, Mr. Trump has made more than 100 specific threats "to investigate, prosecute, jail, or otherwise punish" people he regards as enemies, including Mr. Biden, Kamala Harris, members of Congress, judges, and prosecutors.

Trump says he will round up, deport millions of immigrants. Believe him.

In his own words

"With your vote, we will seal the border, stop the invasion, and launch the largest deportation effort in American history."

Standing on a dirt road along the Mexican border in Arizona in August, Mr. Trump offered a version of the promise that has become the signature of his third presidential campaign.

Why you should believe him

Mr. Trump has repeatedly said that he would move quickly to deport millions of people who are living in the United States without legal permission. A key aide, Stephen Miller, said last year that militarized detention camps — "large-scale staging grounds" near the border — would be constructed. Mr. Trump would have broad authority to pursue such a plan, though he'd need Congress to provide a lot of money. The estimat-

ed cost of mass deportations runs into the tens of billions of dollars. Such a campaign would tear apart families, disrupt communities, and create a host of economic problems. Mr. Trump similarly promised mass deportations during his 2016 presidential campaign, but over the following four years, his administration deported only about 326,000 people; he was stopped from executing a much broader sweep by a lack of funding, as well as legal challenges and resistance from federal, state, and local officials. Mr. Trump's advisers on immigration policy say that they have learned from that experience and that this time they will be ready to mobilize the government's resources and to withstand legal challenges. One idea is to invoke the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, a law that could be used to deport legal immigrants, too.



Trump supporters hold banners calling to remove huge numbers of migrants, a fixture at Trump campaign events.

● GETTYIMAGES

Trump says he will deploy American military against US citizens. Believe him.



In his own words

"I think the bigger problem is the enemy from within. Not even the people that have come in and destroying our country — by the way, totally destroying our country, the towns, the villages, they're being inundated — but I don't think they're the problem in terms of Election Day. I think the bigger problem are the people from within. We have some very bad people. We have some sick people, radical left lunatics. And I think they're the — and it should be very easily handled by, if necessary, by National Guard, or if really necessary, by the military, because they can't let that happen."

In a Fox News interview on October 13, Mr. Trump said he was primarily concerned about election interference by his domestic political opponents rather than foreign nationals.

Why you should believe him

Mr. Trump has shown his willingness to target people who oppose him and to subject or expose them to violence to suit his ends. After refusing to accept the results of the 2020 election, he incited rioters to sack the Capitol, and several people died as a result. Four years later, he remains insistent that elections are legitimate only if he wins. His power to cause problems after voting ends on November 5 is more limited than it was the last time because he is not in power. But he could still try to foment violence — January 6 cannot be forgotten. His threats to deploy the military against his political opponents, merely for being his political opponents, are a sobering reminder of what kind of president he would be. In June 2020, Mr. Trump threatened to send active-duty military personnel into

A military vehicle passes behind military personnel as protesters rally against the death of George Floyd near the White House in Washington, DC, June 3, 2020.

● REUTERS

the streets of American cities to confront Black Lives Matter protesters. He wanted the soldiers to shoot them in the legs, according to his defense secretary, Mark Esper, who then took the unusual step of publicly rebuffing the president. Mr. Trump subsequently fired Mr. Esper, and the former president has made clear that if he is re-elected, he intends to pick officials who will do what he says. He would continue trying to blur the important boundary that has long kept the American military out of domestic politics, and he is implying that opposing him politically is, in his view, tantamount to treason.