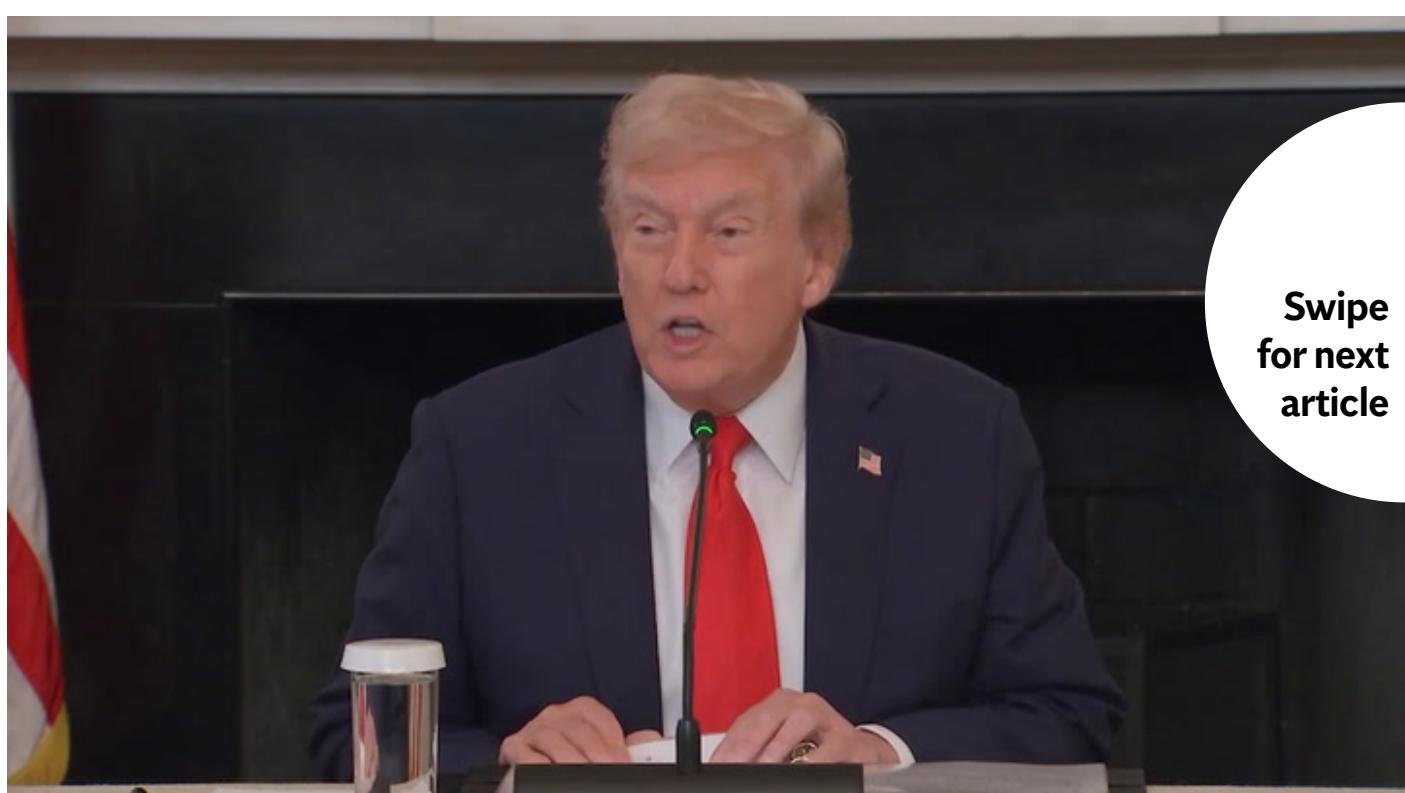


ANALYSIS

Trump just hosted an 'Antifa roundtable' at the White House. It was so much worse than you're imagining

Holly Baxter reports on a meeting that, at one point, appeared to position people protesting against Nazis in the Weimar Republic as the bad guys, and at another saw the president declare, 'We got rid of freedom of speech'

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Trump says 'we took the freedom of speech away' with flag-burning order

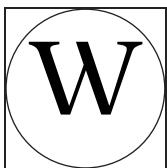


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ake up, babe, new civil liberties infringement propaganda just dropped! Today's instalment of America's ongoing descent into farce brings us a White House press release about "Antifa terror" and a **presidential roundtable** devoted entirely to the group that famously isn't a real entity.

Around noon, a press release appeared on the official White House website, quoting numerous anonymous Portland residents, including a "man," a "woman," *and* a "business owner," all of whom absolutely want the National Guard to storm their city. "I kind of support it 110%" **is an actual quote**.

But that was just the appetizer. At 3 p.m., the televised meeting began. And boy, was there a lot of meat.

Held at the table of "independent journalists" (far-right activists) and moderated by Donald Trump, it opened with a statement by the president that "paid anarchists" want to "destroy our country," followed by bizarre, conspiratorial claims that anti-Trump protesters have signs made of expensive paper with "beautiful wooden handles" that therefore must have been printed in the basements of secretive organizations, and that "we have a lot of records, a lot of surprises, a lot of bad surprises" in store for the people who align themselves with anti-fascism.

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And by the way, he noted, "we got rid of free speech" because flag-burning is bad.



2

President Donald Trump, in one of many animated moments during a roundtable on Antifa he hosted with right-wing influencers in the White House on October 8 (Reuters)

Attorney General Pam Bondi jumped in to underline the message: “We’re going to stop at just arresting people in the street.” No, they’re going to “
down the organization brick by brick” and “destroy the organization from bottom.”

In chimed Kristi Noem, everyone’s favorite puppy killer: Antifa wants to “destroy the American people and their way of life” and is a group that has “infiltrated our entire country,” from “city to city,” cried the Homeland chief. Never mind that the anti-fascist protesters in Portland, Chicago and other Democratic cities are pretty much all homegrown Americans.

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No, insisted ICE Barbie — they are invaders. They are traitors. They are “just as dangerous” as MS-13, Isis and Hamas. Her priority is “making sure they never see the light again.” This, by the way, is the woman who grandstanded about “staring down” Antifa when footage showed it was **actually a couple of photographers and a guy in a chicken suit.**

The quotes came thick and fast from the others around the table. At one point, someone casually addressed an imaginary Antifa member, saying: “You will be

crushed by the Constitution." Just as the Founding Fathers intended, no doubt.

The frenzied energy in the room was palpable even through a screen. Influencer Brandi Kruse did a monologue about how she used to "suffer from Trump Derangement Syndrome" and how, since she changed sides, "I'm happier, I'm more healthy, I think I'm even a bit more attractive."

Not to be outdone, in came Jack Posobiec, one of the right's weirdest hangers-on, who is perhaps most famous for the time he spread the "Pizzagate" theory and then got removed from the pizzeria in question by police for filming a child's birthday party. Running with the major theme of the hour — that Antifa is definitely, certainly, really real despite all evidence to the contrary, and that everybody needs to stop saying it's not real — Posobiec made a startling claim: Antifa is so clearly real that it "has been going on for almost 100 years ... going back to the Weimar Republic in Germany."

And look, yes, it is absolutely true that there were anti-fascist protesters in the Weimar Republic. If you'll remember, those were the people taking issue with the early versions of the Nazis. But it's sort of difficult to position yourself as the good guys if you're aligning yourself with the Nazis in your historical analogy. I'm just saying that, if I was Posobiec's publicity guy, I might ask him to drop that soundbite from future public appearances.

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The State Dining Room at the White House played host to a bizarre discussion about a group that doesn't formally exist (AFP via Getty)

I think we all know what's going on here. But let's begin with the fundamental truth: Antifa *isn't* real — at least, not in the way one convenes a roundtable. It has no central command structure, no coherent leadership, no membership rolls, no headquarters. It is a loose ideological umbrella — a term that is sometimes used by disparate activists and local groups, but much more frequently by the far-right than by the supposed lefties who are part of it.

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Obviously, the fact that there's no proof anyone even really identifies as Antifa didn't stop the White House from designating the "group" a terrorist organization a couple of weeks ago.

Research shows that genuine political violence remains overwhelmingly driven by far-right actors, not nebulous "Antifa" networks. But this, truly, is where MAGA has arrived at: a place so far removed from observable reality that it now holds official government functions with imaginary enemies. Once, conservatism prided itself on being "the party of realism." Today's version treats politics as fan fiction, complete with invented villains and lore.

Such productive unreality takes the energy that could be spent on governing or

solving problems and redirects it into myth-making. Instead of talking about wages, housing or climate disasters, we'll talk about black-clad anarchists who can't be fact-checked because they're mostly not real. And then we'll use their alleged existence to justify sending masked men with rifles into cities that, it just so happens, didn't vote for us. You could almost admire the absurdity if it wasn't attached to actual state power.

The constant threats at this roundtable aimed at "people with money" who are supposedly "funding" Antifa are the real point. And, like a lot of the White House's output at the moment, it is intended to intimidate as many people as possible into silence.

In their little room with their teeny little microphones, a bunch of very important people in heavy makeup entered into a collective delusion today. They're desperate for everybody else to join them. But there are some facts that just won't un-fact. And for those of us who fancy ourselves OK with words, let's remember that, no matter how much you twist it, being anti-anti-fascism means being fascist, even — especially — in the Weimar Republic. That's just elementary logic.

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