Letter in response to the NYT Opinion article– Tom Cotton: Send in the Troops

Dear James, Katie, Jim, Dean, A.G., Mark and Meredith,

As employees, we write to express our deep concern about the publication of an Op-Ed piece from Senator Tom Cotton, titled "Send In The Troops."

The Op-Ed from Cotton calls for the military to be brought in as Americans are protesting racism and police brutality in the United States. We believe his message undermines the work we do, in the newsroom and in opinion, and is an affront to our standards for ethical and accurate reporting for the public's interest.

Although his piece specifically refers to looters as the targets of military action, his proposal would no doubt encourage further violence. Invariably, violence, official and unofficial, disproportionately hurts black and brown people. It also jeopardizes our journalists' ability to work safely and effectively on the streets.

As Dean and Joe wrote in a recent note to the newsroom staff, "We are reporting on a story that does not have a direct precedent in our lifetimes."

Our ability to rise to this occasion depends on values the paper has long espoused: a commitment to a balanced and factual report and a promise to readers that we will be there, on the ground, to bring them the unbiased news.

We understand the Opinion department's commitment to publish a diversity of views, but editorial management's inadequate vetting of this view gravely undermines the work we do every day. If Cotton's call to arms is to be conveyed to our readers at all, it should be subject to rigorous questioning and rebuttal of its shaky facts and gross assumptions. For instance, Cotton writes that Antifa has "infiltrated protest marches to exploit Floyd's death for their own anarchic purposes." In fact, we have reported that this is misinformation

(https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/01/technology/george-floyd-misinformation-online.ht ml). Though Cotton claims protesters have been primarily responsible for violence, our own reporting

(https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/police-tactics-floyd-protests.html) shows that in many cities police have escalated violence. Other claims, like that the "riots were carnivals for the thrill-seeking rich," are not backed up by fact. At one point, Cotton misquotes the U.S. Constitution. This is a particularly vulnerable moment in American history. Cotton's Op-Ed pours gasoline on the fire.

In publishing an Op-Ed that appears to call for violence, promotes hate, and rests its arguments on several factual inaccuracies while glossing over other matters that require expert legal interpretation, we fail our readers. Choosing to present this point of view without added context leaves members of the American public — whom our newspaper aims to serve and inform — vulnerable to harm. Heeding a call to "send in the troops" has historically resulted in harm to black and brown people, like the ones who are vital members of The New York Times family.

We fail our sources and freelancers — many of whom expressed their unwillingness to further work with us because of this piece — by unfairly applying scrutiny to subjects we cover without applying the same rigorous interrogation to our own institution. And we jeopardize our reporters' ability to work safely and effectively.

A newsroom has a responsibility to hold power to account, not amplify powerful voices without context and caution.

We ask that The Times take the following actions:

- -- A commitment to the thorough vetting, fact-checking, and real-time rebuttal of Opinion pieces, including seeking perspective and debate from across the desk's diverse staff before publication.
- -- An editor's note or ideally, a fully reported follow-up examining the facts of Cotton's Op-Ed.
- -- A commitment that Cotton's Op-Ed not appear in any future print edition.
- -- Staff shortages on the Community team should be addressed immediately, as readers need an opportunity to express themselves.

Not everyone agrees with what is published by The Times, and we expect that. We are not here to please but to inform, even when the truth is uncomfortable. Our standards cannot be bent to suit what is already published; we ask instead that everything The Times publishes, in News and Opinion, be held to evenly applied and rigorous standards across the paper.

The mission of The New York Times is to "seek the truth and help people understand the world." Cotton's Op-Ed falls far short.

Signed,