

Black Hawk helicopters over Las Vegas, snipers in Times Square

2004 begins with massive military mobilization in US cities

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The new year began in the US under conditions of an unparalleled mobilization of police, army and federal law enforcement agents in major urban centers. Alleging a heightened threat of terrorist attacks and operating under the Department of Homeland Security's "Orange Alert," the Bush administration undertook measures such as were never seen during the Second World War or at the height of the Cold War.

Major events scheduled for New Year's Eve and New Year's Day took place under bizarre circumstances. Homeland Security chief Tom Ridge declared that Americans "need to go out and celebrate New Year's," even as he banned flights over New York City, Chicago and Las Vegas and ordered Black Hawk military helicopters to hover over Manhattan's Times Square, where some 750,000 people gathered to welcome in the new year, the Las Vegas strip, and the Rose Bowl football game in Pasadena, California.

Snipers manned the rooftops over Times Square, while New York streets and its harbor were flooded with thousands of police, including many plainclothes officers. Bomb-sniffing dogs were on duty in New York and counter-terror units carried equipment to detect chemical, biological or radiological contamination.

Authorities suspended oil shipments for two days from Alaska's major port of Valdez as part of "a continuing effort to ensure the security of our homeland," in the words of a Department of Homeland Security official.

These measures, aimed at terrorizing and intimidating the population, must be taken as a serious warning of the aims of the Bush administration in 2004 and beyond.

The military and police mobilization over New Year's failed to produce any arrests or evidence of a terrorist plot. Yet this far-flung operation did not provoke the slightest skepticism or criticism from within the media and political establishment. Not a single voice—least of all from the Democratic Party—suggested that the government should be required to substantiate its claims or justify its extraordinary measures.

This posture of unquestioning faith in the good word of the Bush administration follows the thorough exposure of its pre-war statements in support of war against Iraq—from lurid tales of WMD stockpiles to allegations of Iraqi links to Al Qaeda—as a tissue of lies. No one on the public airwaves so much as suggests that a government that lies in order to drag its population into war should

not be given a carte blanche to militarize all aspects of daily life within the US.

US officials also took unprecedented steps in regard to air travel. They forced British and Mexican airlines to cancel flights and US fighter jets escorted several Air France flights into American airspace. These actions were taken, according to government spokesmen, in response to "real and definite" threats.

Six flights between Paris and Los Angeles were canceled December 24 and 25. Passengers on board British Airways Flight 223 from London on New Year's Eve were detained for several hours at Washington DC's Dulles International Airport and questioned by federal agents. The daily flights from London to Washington DC were subsequently cancelled on January 1 and 2. British Airways also cancelled a flight from London to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Ridge suggested that Al Qaeda-trained pilots or flight crew members might have infiltrated an international airline. "Since we know that they've trained pilots before, we take it as a fact that there may be some out there that have been trained—how completely trained, we don't know," he told reporters.

US intelligence may possibly have wind of further terrorist attacks on air traffic. The measures taken are so financially damaging to the airlines that the existence of serious threats can by no means be ruled out. At the same time, the refusal of the US government to give the public any information about the alleged threats tends, if anything, to undermine the credibility of its claims, while militating against effective measures to protect the flying public and the population as a whole.

If, in fact, the threat to the traveling public has grown to the desperate level indicated by the US-dictated measures, the responsibility rests squarely with American imperialism and the policies of the Bush administration. The US government's open-ended "war on terror," including the invasion and occupation of Iraq, has enraged and alienated vast layers of the world's Muslim population, who believe, with justification, that US imperialism is waging a war against them. The reckless and bloodthirsty policies of Bush and Company have doubtless produced new recruits for reactionary movements like Osama bin Laden's.

These policies, far from protecting the people of the US and the world from terrorist crimes, have heightened the chances that thousands more innocent people will die in such attacks. They may

very well have dangerously compromised the air traffic safety system. The feverish actions of the past several days suggest that the Bush administration is sitting atop a crisis of its own making, with which it does not know how to cope.

None of this can be discussed in the American media. The gangster character of the Bush administration is well known in official political and media circles, but no one suggests that it could have ulterior motives in setting its “Code Orange” alert in motion, or that the permanent terrorist threat might be linked in any fashion to US foreign policy.

Former Vermont governor Howard Dean, the current frontrunner and supposed antiwar candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, refused to answer a question about the “Code Orange” while campaigning in New Hampshire, saying, “I’m not the one who sets the terror alert level.” Seeking to position himself as “tougher” on security issues than the Bush administration, Massachusetts Senator John Kerry, another Democratic candidate, denounced the “preparedness gap” in the administration’s homeland security policies and proposed spending more federal money to build up the police and military presence at home.

Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut simply solidarized himself with Ridge and his Department of Homeland Security, declaring, “They made the right decision. They had enough intelligence information to make me worry about the possibility of another terrorist threat, and a serious one.”

The notion that the claims of the Bush administration should be taken at face value is absurd. This is a government that took office through the hijacking of a national election and systematically lied to justify an illegal invasion of Iraq.

It has provided no explanation for the events of September 11, 2001, and has opposed any serious probe of the terrorist attacks, including an examination of the past and present connections of US intelligence to Osama bin Laden and the Al Qaeda network. The anthrax attack, an attempt to assassinate the leadership of the opposition party in Congress, has resulted in no arrests or indictments.

What are the Bush administration’s real aims?

- * To keep the population in a constant state of fear and anxiety as a means of justifying the occupation of Iraq and future wars presently in the planning stage, as well as the destruction of democratic rights at home.

- * To acclimate the American people to the presence of the military in every facet of daily life.

- * To carry out dry-run rehearsals for mass repression and the imposition of martial law at some future date.

- * To divert attention from the mounting social crisis in America—the destruction of millions of jobs, the growth of long-term unemployment, and the increasingly malignant gap between the wealthy elite and the rest of the population.

The intensity and aggressiveness of the war drive and the assault on democratic rights are fueled by the social crisis, for which no section of the political establishment, conservative or “liberal,” has any answer. In addition to the nearly 20 million unemployed or underemployed, tens of millions more live on wages that are barely subsistence level.

The government and the media can crow all they like about the

“economic recovery,” but the deterioration of the conditions of wide layers of the population is a fact of American life that must find explosive political expression, sooner rather than later.

The recent actions are directly linked as well to the Republicans’ 2004 electoral strategy. Black Hawk helicopters overhead, snipers on rooftops—this is an essential component of the Bush team’s election campaign. They intend to intimidate as much of the population as they can. They intend to keep the people off guard and on the defensive, hesitant about opposing a president “in war-time.”

Real or fabricated terrorist plots will be used to rationalize the most extreme attacks on democratic rights, up to and including the calling off of the national election itself.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has previously stated, the gravest threat to the safety, security and basic rights of the American people does not come from foreign terrorists, real or imaginary, but from the US government, which is a government of conspiracy, secrecy and lies.

The complicity of the media establishment and the Democrats in the Bush administration’s provocations flows from the consensus that exists within the American ruling elite on the goal of US world hegemony. The “war on terror,” which every wing of the political elite supports, is the official euphemism for this strategy of global domination. The domestic consequence of this foreign policy is the regimentation and militarization of American life and the drift toward authoritarian rule.

These international and domestic processes are interconnected and inseparable. A critical political lesson—which can already be drawn from the war in Iraq and its repercussions in the US—has to be grasped as we enter 2004. It is not possible to resist the attacks on civil liberties and democratic rights at home without mounting a conscious and systematic opposition to US imperialist aggression abroad.

Conversely, it is not possible to effectively oppose US militarism apart from the building of a mass, independent movement of the working class in defense of democratic rights and the social interests of the broad masses of the people. Such a movement must strive to end the rule of the financial oligarchy and replace it with a workers’ government armed with a socialist program.



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