

# Military conducts urban warfare exercises in Chicago area

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The US Department of Defense conducted urban warfare training drills in Tinley Park, Illinois, a southwestern suburb of Chicago, during the nights of April 23 and 24. The drills, conducted in coordination with the Illinois state government, came a week after the police shutdown of the city of Boston following the marathon bombings.

Similar exercises have been conducted recently in Miami, Florida and Houston, Texas. Stories emerged in local media only after frightened residents called in reports of explosions. It is not known how many such operations have been conducted in other cities.

The drills held in Tinley Park took place at the now-closed Tinley Park Mental Health Center. The center was shut down by Illinois Democratic Governor Pat Quinn last June as part of a series of budget cuts that have targeted education, mental health and other social services in the state. That a facility once devoted to social services has been so quickly converted into a training ground for military operations reveals the ruling elite's attitude toward the basic needs of the population.

Since its closing, the facility has been the site of numerous training exercises conducted by local, state and federal police agencies. According to Tinley Park's director of emergency management, Pat Carr, the military exercise "simulated live fire, explosive training and helicopter operations."

The Department of Defense has maintained secrecy about the details of the exercises, including which branches of the military were involved. It has explicitly stated that the public is not welcome to witness the goings-on. The *Chicago Sun-Times* reported that it would be a "regional urban training" event, including the military and local police agencies.

One of the reasons for the use of the site is to

simulate "building breaching." According to Carr, among the operations being practiced were "breaking down doors, doing room-to-room searches, things like that."

Aside from a large number of explosions, the area swarmed with Black Hawk and special operations helicopters flying low, in some cases without their lights.

It is apparently standard practice to announce these events just the day before, though most residents do not get such notices. Tinley Park residents were given extra time only as a result of the events in Boston, so as to avoid emergency services being overwhelmed by calls.

In January, the military conducted a series of drills in Miami that involved soldiers rappelling from Black Hawk helicopters onto the city's downtown Government Center Metrorail elevated station, as well as simulated helicopter strafing runs and firing exercises with blank rounds.

Also in January, dozens of Houston residents called in reports of Army helicopters flying over a neighborhood in the city's southeast as part of an exercise at a shut-down school. One resident commented, "I felt like I was in a war zone. It was nonstop. I was terrified."

In November 2011, Boston police SWAT teams, transit police and other forces, including the Coast Guard and intelligence forces, participated in so-called Urban Shield exercises funded by the Department of Homeland Security through the Urban Areas Security Initiative, established in 2011 by a presidential directive from Barack Obama. Urban Shield exercises have also been held widely in California and other states over the past two years.

Chicago too held military training exercises to prepare soldiers to "operate in urban environments"

from April 16-19 of last year as part of preparations for the May 20-21 NATO summit held in the city. The NATO summit itself was a massive operation on the part of security forces, which shut down parts of the city, violently attacked dozens of protesters and arrested hundreds more. Charges of domestic terrorism were filed against several of the protesters.

The inevitable question arises from such operations: What cities is the US military planning on invading? Damascus? Tehran? Beijing or Moscow? Or are such exercises a preparation for military operations within the United States itself? The American ruling class is well aware of the immense social discontent that is building up in the country.

Over the past decade, under both Democrats and Republicans, the military has systematically extended its purview over the United States, part of the assault on democratic rights carried out under the banner of the “war on terror.” This includes the establishment of the US Northern Command, a unified military command structure responsible for overseeing the United States. In this context, the regular holding of military training exercises in major US urban centers has ominous implications.

The unprecedented shutdown of the city of Boston after the marathon bombings—including of “shelter in place” orders to nearly one million people and warrantless door-to-door searches by heavily armed SWAT teams—gives an indication of the plans that have already been developed by the state to respond to social unrest.



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