

Towns in Upstate New York placed under lockdown in manhunt for escaped prisoners

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Police have placed several towns in Upstate New York on lockdown in the search for two prisoners who escaped from Clinton Correctional Facility in the town of Dannemora in the Adirondacks last weekend.

At least eight hundred law enforcement officers have been deployed to the region, including members of the FBI and U.S. Marshals. Local residents have been given telephone instructions to stay locked in their homes.

“Life has been insane,” resident Steve Lashway told CNN. “We have... officers on every corner with shotguns, and there are roadblocks up everywhere.”

The massive manhunt was triggered by the June 6 escape of Richard Matt, 48, and David Sweat, 34, who had been convicted of murder. Since then, the area surrounding Clinton Correctional Facility has taken on the appearance of territory under military occupation. Photographs from the scene show police in full military gear, replete with combat helmets, army camouflage, and assault rifles. The FBI has deployed armored vehicles with surveillance equipment, and multiple helicopters have been circling around the area using thermal cameras to search for the prisoners.

Resident Brooke Lepage told CNN, “I haven’t left home in two days, I had to call in to work today because you wouldn’t be able to return back home. There were constant helicopters. Last night they had floodlights.”

Every residence, business and school in the area has been searched. Some residents are reportedly only able to leave their homes if accompanied by a state trooper escort.

On Friday classes were cancelled at the local Saranac Central School District for a second day. Previously, state troopers had been posted throughout the schools, with students taking their recesses indoors.

There are police checkpoints all through the area. Police stop every car, checking trunks and questioning people. Officials have also closed down the main highway through the area, Route 374, in order to divert motorists to the smaller roads with checkpoints.

Lashway, who owns a deli store, told CNN that the operation was “like a military state... It’s been crazy with all the rumors. Just about every day, somebody comes into the shop and says, ‘They’ve got ‘em. They’ve got ‘em.’ But nope, they don’t. The next day same thing.”

The breakout and subsequent manhunt has been the subject of non-stop reporting by the major news networks. Each new lead, whether it is a food wrapper outside of a Subway sandwich shop or a footprint that might have belonged to the convicts, whips the press into a frenzy.

Particular attention has been given to a woman who has been accused of helping the men escape. CNN ran a piece entitled, “Who is Joyce Mitchell,” while Fox News ran a video special on “Inside the mind of women who help criminals.”

The media hysteria has had an impact. Hundreds of miles away in Philadelphia a taxi cab driver called police after he picked up two men that resembled the escaped prisoners. Philadelphia police proceeded to engage in their own hunt for the men until detectives reviewed surveillance footage and realized that they were chasing the wrong men.

The military-style lockdown is only the latest in a series of massively disproportionate military-style police mobilizations over the recent period. The city of Boston saw a similar lock-down following the Boston marathon bombing in April 2013. During the protests in Ferguson, Missouri in August 2015, police and National Guard set up checkpoints in whole areas of the

city and enforced a curfew, and the National Guard was deployed to Baltimore, Maryland following protests against the killing of Freddie Gray in April.

The militarized manhunt in Upstate New York takes place amid the growing regularization of military training inside US urban areas. Last week the military conducted a nighttime mock helicopter raid of a building in downtown Flint, Michigan with virtually no announcement to residents. Local media reported the drills after terrified residents unexpectedly heard gunshots and explosions.

These war games are a prelude to the two-month-long Jade Helm 15 exercises, which will be held between July and September. The military said that the “size and scope of Jade Helm sets this one apart.” It will be conducted across seven states in the Southwest and will involve, according to the Victoria County Sheriff’s Office of Texas, “cells of people” who will “test how well they’re able to move around without getting too noticed in the community.”

In December of last year 2,000 troops were deployed to Downtown Los Angeles for urban warfare drills. This followed unannounced military training exercises in Chicago, Miami, and Houston in 2013.

Last June, the US Army released a report warning that “radical income disparity” would be the major “driver of instability” in the near future. Within this context, the world’s “megacities will be the strategic key terrain in any future crisis that requires U.S. military intervention.” According to the report, the Pentagon has conducted “case studies” and “field work” to prepare for interventions in areas including New York City.



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