

# Security theater at Trump Tower in New York City

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The militarized police apparatus of the New York Police Department (NYPD) is making its presence felt in no uncertain terms on New York's Fifth Avenue at Trump Tower, where Donald Trump, the billionaire mogul, is holding court as he prepares to assume the presidency in January.

Police wearing body armor and toting high-powered, military-grade rifles stand at the entrance to Trump Tower and on nearby side streets. Dozens of uniformed and plainclothes officers are nearby. Dump trucks loaded with sand act as movable barriers to bar motor vehicles from accessing East 56th Street, which is where the service and private entrances to Trump Tower are located. Access to the entire East 56th Street block between Fifth and Madison Avenues has been effectively shut down, causing economic hardship for businesses and restaurants, with police turning away all but a few who attempt to enter.

Trump's private residence is located in one of the most densely populated areas of the largest city in the United States. Trump Tower lies in close proximity to the private residences of some of the wealthiest individuals in the US, including those on so called "billionaires row," a cluster of extremely tall residential towers located on West 57th Street just south of Central Park. The area is also home to the headquarters of a number of banks, investment firms and national media. In addition, it ranks among the world's most expensive shopping districts, home to upscale retailers including Bergdorf-Goodman, Cartier and Tiffany and Co.

A member of the City Council, Dan Garodnick, recently wrote a letter to the police commissioner complaining about the impact of the hyper-security. He told the *Daily News*, "It looks like a war zone out there and is completely uninviting. The small businesses are getting pummeled."

During recent protests, police helicopters, presumably using high-powered surveillance equipment to photograph protesters and give direction to officers on the ground, hovered above the skyscrapers in the vicinity.

Militarized SWAT and other heavily armed police tactical units have become a common sight on the streets of New York in recent years, particularly around major transportation hubs and in the busy theater district, and often appear at random locations. Their presence is clearly meant to be intimidating and many city residents feel it is.

One can imagine the devastating consequences were their military-grade weaponry to be used in such a crowded and confined urban arena as the streets and public spaces of Midtown Manhattan. Trump Tower became the target of protests following the election, and is likely to remain so as the impact of the Trump presidency on the working class unfolds, making clashes with police increasingly probable.

The unprecedented mobilization of security forces has come at a great expense to the city. CNN Money has reported the cost to NYC taxpayers for policing Trump Tower in the aftermath of the election at "more than \$1 million a day."

Democratic Mayor Bill de Blasio has requested that the city be reimbursed by the federal government for a total of \$35 million, representing the extra expenses it has incurred in providing security for Trump between his election and the inauguration on 20 January. The stopgap spending bill just passed by Congress reportedly includes some money to reimburse the city. Last week, House Republicans approved only \$7 million, but the amount included in the final version passed by the Senate has not yet been revealed.

In a city where over 60,000 people, a large portion of

them children, spend each night in decrepit homeless shelters, and many thousands live on the streets, this huge outlay of public funds stands in sharp contrast to the grossly inadequate support given to city services such as education, public housing and transportation, for which there is supposedly never enough money.

It is likely that the provision of security and the incumbent expenses will continue following the inauguration. Trump's wife Melania and son Barron reportedly plan to continue to live at Trump Tower, at least for the rest of the school year. Beyond that, Trump is unlikely to abandon his \$90 million penthouse triplex pied-a-terre in the city.

The *New York Post* reports that the Secret Service, the federal agency responsible for providing presidential security, is negotiating to lease two floors of Trump Tower to house a security headquarters staffed with 250 agents and police.

Since Trump owns the building, in effect the federal government would be paying rent, estimated to be at least \$3 million per year, to the president--yet one more example of conflict of interest between Trump's business interests and his role as president. This payment would be a welcome infusion of cash for a building where rent and sale prices for residential units have fallen 40 percent in the past year, as wealthy residents flee the commotion caused by Trump's presence.

Despite the tremendous burden on the city's budget, the Democratic mayor has demonstrated his willingness to accommodate Trump. In a statement to the press, de Blasio said, "The number one imperative here is safety and security. We owe that to the president-elect, his family, and his team." De Blasio, along with other Democrats, has expressed his intent to work with the Trump administration. He has stated, "...my job is to be respectful and seek dialogue," referring to a phone conversation he had with Trump.

The many New York residents turning out to protest apparently do not share the mayor's magnanimous feelings. One Verizon worker the WSWS spoke to who lives in the Castle Hill section of the Bronx expressed frustration at being stuck for a long period of time on a bus on Madison Avenue while heading home after work. Police had herded protesters away from Trump Tower onto the Avenue, making it impassable.

Fifth Avenue is used by a number of express and

local bus routes which transport working New Yorkers to their jobs in the city's core. Since the heightened security began around the tower immeasurable hours have been added to the commute time of thousands of people.

In addition to the overblown security measures around Trump Tower, there is a general stepped up police deployment in Manhattan. Some city residents have said the police presence feels like an occupying force. In one recent incident, at the height of rush hour, tens of thousands of bus and automobile commuters were delayed at the Lincoln Tunnel to allow Trump's vehicle to pass through en route to New Jersey, severely exacerbating the already intolerably long wait.

The fact that militarized police units are routinely seen on the streets of New York speaks volumes regarding class relations in one of the most socially and economically unequal cities in the world. The spectacle around Trump Tower underscores in dramatic, if not absurd, fashion the sharpening class antagonisms under capitalism. It expresses, on the one hand, the utter arrogance and sense of entitlement of the American ruling class, and, on the other, their awareness of the extreme danger to their interests generated by ever-growing social and economic inequality.



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