

Militarized police deployed to Los Angeles subway system after bomb hoax

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16 December 2016

On December 5, dogs, barricades, heavily armed sheriff's deputies, and undercover police from the FBI, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), and Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD) were deployed to the subway system of Los Angeles, California in response to a fake bomb threat called in from Australia.

Commuters taking the Red Line subway were subjected to compulsory bag searches, then accosted by waiting news reporters fishing for public endorsement of these authoritarian measures. The Metro system in Los Angeles serves a vast portion of the region's working class, with over 33 million boardings a month.

The bomb threat and the ensuing police deployment were publicly announced only the night before in a hastily convened news conference. Most commuters, unaware of the threat, were surprised by the militarized police at Metro station entrances and were kept uninformed of the threat.

Zara, a worker who regularly takes the Red Line every morning from the Universal City station to downtown Los Angeles, told the *World Socialist Web Site* that areas of the station were cordoned off to control commuter movement, and that the station was filled with "a plethora of police, army figures, and media with cameras".

"What looked like an army person said [to me], 'We need to search your bag.'" After Zara expressed her fear that she would miss her train, another heavily armed officer stepped forward and told her not to worry and that it wouldn't take long. Zara felt compelled to comply with the searches. "I placed my bags on the table and they searched thoroughly. After he was done, a reporter who said she was from the *Daily News* stuck a mic in my face and asked me how 'that' felt, which I thought was rather bizarre. I did not answer, first

because I was in a rush, secondly I felt intimidated and shocked by what had just happened, leaving me speechless..."

The bogus "tip" came from an anonymous, English-speaking man in Australia. Deputy Chief Michael Downing of LAPD's Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau admitted at the time that "the credibility [of the threat] is not high... But it does present an opportunity to say there are people that want to do bad things to good people." LA Police Commander Horace Frank told reporters that even if the call wasn't credible, "we have shown the ability to gather information overseas and respond rapidly in Los Angeles."

An FBI statement released at the end of the following day said that the source of the bomb threat has probably called in fake threats in the past. "Based on significant similarities, law enforcement partners also believe the anonymous caller may have, on a previous occasion, reported threats that did not materialize," the FBI said.

In the name of the fraudulent 'War on Terror', workers and youth have been subjected to the abrogation of their civil liberties, mass surveillance, and domestic deployments of militarized police forces. The massive police deployment on December 5 is only the latest development in the steady militarization of LA's Metro system.

Sheriff's deputies clad in olive drab body armor and carrying rifles are a not infrequent sight throughout the Metro. Posters in trains encourage commuters to report suspicious packages. In the days after the March terror attacks in Brussels, squads of militarized deputies and sniffer dogs swarmed the Metro.

"I've noticed an influx of armed personnel patrolling the subway system gradually becoming more pronounced this year," Zara told the WSWs. "There

are clusters of armed personnel dressed in green. Some of them have dogs. After tapping your [fare] card through the main entrance, they'll set checkpoints within the station where they ask you to show your Tap card again... More recently, when you're on the train, undercover police, upon exhibiting their ID, request that you show your Tap card whilst the train is in motion. The trains were often populated with homeless people. That has now decreased since the military presence has increased but I don't think that's the solution for homelessness."

Zara offered the following insight: "Since the 'War on Terror' has been pushed on the masses, I've seen an increase of police activity not only in the Metro system, but on the streets in general. I'm seeing weird-shaped vehicles that look like they came from the Iraq War being deployed on the streets and at the station. Presence of security and police personnel has definitely increased through the years since the Iraq War began. To me, it looks like it's morphing into a police state. Now that they can search your bags in the Metro station without any explanation, let alone a court order, it seems to me that we are entering a dictatorial regime. It starts gradually and you may not even realize until your freedoms are drastically curtailed and we're in a different 'democracy.'"

Los Angeles Democratic mayor Eric Garcetti said that the abrupt and intimidating police operation on December 5 would "reassure people that we will have the necessary forces around and near in our public transportation system to assure passengers that today is a safe day to go about our business." He urged commuters to continue going about their business while heavily armed men stood behind orange barricades outside the Metro stations and a police helicopter flew overhead.

Garcetti rode Red Line trains throughout the morning, offering unsolicited reassurances of personal safety to passengers desperate to get to work and school on time.

"The eyes and ears of the people of Los Angeles are the most important force multiplier we have," Garcetti told the press.

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) has proposed a new policing plan that would increase the daily police presence throughout the Metro from 200 officers to 240 officers. The five-year, \$547 million contract would split

policing of the Metro system between the LAPD, LASD, and the city of Long Beach Police Department. The LASD currently holds an exclusive contract with the LACMTA. Garcetti supports the proposal, saying that the new policing system would "immediately be able to multiply our force in different cities".

Zara warned that workers and youth internationally should "anticipate more mass militarization. There has been an increase worldwide of police presence in public affairs, as I gather from the media. We need to reject this and be conscious of what's happening. Here in the US especially, police kill with impunity. This reflects this country's foreign policy..." Zara noted the increase in state repression at home and internationally. "They are taking away important democratic rights and we cannot just accept this... soon there will be no freedom of speech or movement in the name of the 'War on Terror.' One has to ask oneself who the actual terrorists are."



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