

Massive security operations planned for US New Year's celebrations

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Police departments throughout the United States have seized upon the attack on a Christmas market in Berlin this month to justify a massive security buildup surrounding New Year's Eve celebrations in major US cities.

These military-style operations accompanying New Year's ceremonies, often placing whole sections of city centers on lockdown, have become as much of an annual tradition in the United States as the celebrations themselves.

The security buildup comes in spite of the absence of any credible threats of terror attacks within the United States.

"U.S. defence and security agencies said they believed the threat of militant attacks inside the United States was low during this New Year's holiday," Reuters reported yesterday. However, federal security bulletins have made unsubstantiated statements of concern over "homegrown violent extremists" carrying out attacks against celebrations.

The real function of these operations is not to ensure the safety of the crowds but to stoke fears over possible terror attacks in order to legitimize American imperialism's wars abroad and to acclimate the population to police-state measures and attacks on democratic rights at home.

In New York City, where more than a million people traditionally flock to Times Square to ring in the new year, preparations will far exceed even the unprecedented military-style operation conducted last year, in the wake of the terror attacks in Paris and the mass shooting in San Bernardino, California, when thousands of officers, supported by snipers, bomb-sniffing dogs, surveillance cameras, and helicopters, herded revelers through multiple checkpoints before being cordoned off into one of dozens of enclosures in

the square itself.

This year, more than 7,000 officers will descend upon Times Square and the surrounding neighborhood. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, "Highly visible heavy-weapons teams will be deployed in Times Square, as well as counterterrorism officers equipped with long guns and bomb-sniffing dogs. Throughout Saturday and into the night, detailed personnel will sweep hotels, theaters and parking garages for threats and suspicious packages, according to authorities. Plainclothes police officers will be in the crowds, hundreds of cameras will monitor the area and a fleet of helicopters will fly above Times Square." Twenty-seven streets in the middle of Manhattan, the most densely populated area in the country, will be closed down to accommodate the operation.

But the "main event" of this year's operation in New York City will be the placement of dozens of garbage trucks filled with sand to weight them down outside the event to act as barriers against attacks with trucks of the kind carried out in Berlin and Nice, France, earlier this year.

Over the past few months, the trucks have "become a regular feature of the city's security infrastructure," the *New York Times* observed, having previously been deployed outside Trump Tower on Election Day and at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. The paper noted that these trucks would also be deployed at Central Park and on the Coney Island boardwalk, where separate events are being planned.

Summing up the conversion of an annual holiday celebration into an armed fortification, New York Police Department Police Commissioner James O'Neill told the press, "We're going to have one of the most well-policed, best protected events at one of the safest venues in the entire world, given all the assets

that we've employed here.”

Similar buildups are being prepared in other major American cities. Officials in Chicago have not released any specific information about their security preparations, but it is expected to be formidable. The city's main celebration at Navy Pier on Lake Michigan is expected to have an increased security presence, including “[s]ecurity officers with metal-detecting wands, uniformed and plain clothes police, and K-9 units,” according to Chicago's CBS affiliate.

In Boston, which was subjected to an unprecedented military style lock-down in 2013 following the Boston Marathon bombing, Police Commissioner William Evans told a press conference, “You'll see some heightened security out there, but you won't see all of it. Also, we'll have a lot of undercover officers. We'll have some bomb assets in the area, so people shouldn't be afraid to come out.”

Boston's public radio station, WBUR, is telling people to “[e]xpect to see barricades blocking roads around the Copley Square area, similar to how BPD now blocks off areas along the Boston Marathon route using dump trucks.”

Atlanta's police department has canceled all of its officers' off days and instituted 12-hour shifts in order to patrol the city's New Year's celebrations as well as the Peach Bowl college football game between Alabama and Washington taking place today. “You'll see more officers in high visibility uniforms, we'll have our K-9 unit fully deployed, we have our special operations response team,” the head of the local transit agency's Emergency Preparedness Unit told the press.

In New Orleans, the city will “dispatch heavy trucks to blockade much of Bourbon Street,” the main road in the city's famous French Quarter entertainment district, *USA Today* reported. Additional personnel from both the New Orleans Police Department and the Louisiana State Police will be deployed to heavily trafficked areas of the city. At least some of them will be equipped with tactical gear, Mayor Mitch Landrieu announced, for the first time in the city's history (although the city was infamously occupied by the National Guard for months following Hurricane Katrina).

In the Los Angeles suburb of Pasadena, home of the annual Tournament of Roses Parade and associated Rose Bowl college football game, last year's unprecedented buildup involving 2,000 federal officers

from dozens of agencies will be increased again this year. Water-filled barriers will be placed at over 50 intersections along the parade route, the *Los Angeles Times* reported, in response to the attacks in Berlin and Nice. Roughly 1,500 police officers will patrol the parade route, Pasadena Police Chief Phillip L. Sanchez said.

Citing the increased resources available after the Department of Homeland Security assigned the highest possible threat rating to the parade, a Pasadena police lieutenant told the local news website Pasadena Now, “We have not pulled back from increasing these resources and we don't have plans to decrease by any means.”



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