Massive police mobilization on eve of Trump's inauguration

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There is no "specific, credible threat" expected at Donald Trump's inauguration exercises in Washington, DC this Friday, said Jeh Johnson, outgoing Secretary of Homeland Security. Nevertheless, extraordinary security measures will be taken in response to protests.

An estimated 28,000 representatives of the US security apparatus—from the US Secret Service, Transportation Security Administration (TSA), FBI, US Park Police, US Capitol Police, Coast Guard and municipal police—are coordinating operations in order to control and monitor onlookers, according to Johnson. The total cost of this police mobilization is estimated at $100 million.

Security personnel expect about 900,000 people to gather in Washington on Friday. This is typical of inauguration ceremonies. Barack Obama's swearing-in ceremony in 2009 attracted around 1.8 million. Several protest actions have been planned; however, the largest of which—the Women's March on Washington on Saturday—is expected to attract 400,000 to 500,000 participants.

Christopher T. Geldart, the director of Homeland Security for Washington, DC, has said that his team is preparing for several other smaller protest actions throughout the city.

These numbers eclipse demonstrations at any inauguration since the Vietnam War era. In response, security officials have divided the city into a series of "hard" and "soft" perimeters. Police began shutting down entire roads leading into downtown Washington on Thursday afternoon. Dump trucks, cement trucks and other heavy equipment have been employed to block vehicular access to the heart of the city. More than 100 square city blocks, equal to roughly to 2.7 square miles, will be closed.

Those with tickets to the inaugural ceremony will be required to pass through one of six security checkpoints surrounding the National Mall and the Reflecting Pool, where the most stringent security measures have been taken. Officials have published a list of 40 items—among them drums, whistles, umbrellas, signs, and selfie sticks—that are prohibited in the area.

Washington's largest hospitals have been put on high alert as well. Medical staff at Sibley Memorial, Howard University, George Washington University, MedStar Washington Hospital Center, and Children's National Medical Center have been asked not to schedule elective surgeries on Friday. City and Homeland Security officials have requested that emergency departments maintain the highest level of staff attendance and preparation in case of casualties.

Johnson has said that disruptive actions have been anticipated and planned for. One protest group, #DisruptJ20, has called for a "bold mobilization against the inauguration of Donald Trump." The group has been granted permits for a number of small protests, but has also alluded to other "actions." Lacy MacAuley, a spokesperson for #DisruptJ20, stated, "We intend basically to set the tone of resistance here for the coming years."

In response, says Johnson, "special precautions" would be taken by law enforcement. "We are going to have a lot of resources. We've got pretty sophisticated ways to monitor groups and keep tabs on groups and make sure things don't get out of hand," he boasted. He stated that law enforcement has been using social media surveillance to keep abreast of planned actions by both protesters and pro-Trump demonstrators.

In another statement, although Johnson admitted that there existed no "specific, credible threat," he stated that the Department of Homeland Security is concerned about "lone wolf, self-radicalized" attackers. He cited

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the killing of 86 people in Nice, France, when a truck driver ploughed through a crowd gathered for Bastille Day in June of last year.

Trump has brayed loudly about the great crowds he expects to turn out for his inauguration. He praised Bikers for Trump, an assorted group of motorcycle-riding Trump supporters that has vowed to patrol the nation's capital and prevent protests. The group functioned as a vigilante security force for Trump at various rallies during Trump's campaign.

The heightened state of alert aby the US security apparatus, as well as the number of demonstrators, points to both the growing disaffection of Americans with the electoral process and to the mobilization of police and paramilitary forces in response to that disaffection.

The gears of the security apparatus had been well oiled by both George W. Bush and Obama. The response of the ruling class to growing social inequality and discontent is the ever-greater expansion of police powers.

The security measures put into place to protect the inauguration will not simply dissolve on Saturday. They will become increasingly focused and determined, and increasingly equipped to shut down any ongoing demonstration of citizens' dissatisfaction. Said Geldart, "We're basically not going to stand anything down after the inauguration. We're leaving that stuff in place."

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