

New York prepares military-style occupation for New Year's celebration in Times Square

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Police and other security forces will be deployed in record numbers for New York City's traditional New Year's Eve ball drop in Times Square on Sunday night. According to New York Police Department (NYPD) officials, the number of uniformed police deployed in an around the Manhattan landmark will exceed last year's 5,000.

City police, many decked out in full combat gear, will be augmented by state police and FBI personnel. Police on the ground will be supplemented by police snipers in surrounding high-rise buildings as well as bomb-sniffing "vapor wake dogs." Officers will be patrolling hotels in advance of the ball drop.

There will be multiple check points through which those seeking to attend the event will have to pass and widespread checking of bags and other personal belongings of people in Times Square and at nearby subway stations and transit points. Attendees will be herded into 65 fenced-in "viewing pens" surrounded by phalanxes of heavily armed police.

A fleet of 65 large, sand-filled dump trucks, 100 blocker vehicles and other physical barriers will be used to create a fortress ring surrounding the venue, encompassing an area 22 city blocks long and 3 blocks wide. All 125 parking garages in the vicinity will be shut and sealed until Monday.

Huge throngs of revelers typically gather in the center of Manhattan for the annual event. The estimate for last year was two million. This year, in the wake of a number of recent terror attacks in New York and elsewhere, the police presence will be even greater than in previous years, turning Times Square into a veritable armed camp.

An atmosphere of anxiety and fear is being promoted in order to justify the unprecedented mobilization. The federal Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has

assigned the event its highest security threat designation—"SEAR 1"—which is usually given to very high-profile events such as political conventions and the National Football League's Super Bowl, allowing the allocation of additional resources. This is in spite of the fact that New York City Police Commissioner James P. O'Neill told a press conference Thursday, "There are no direct credible threats to New York City, to Times Square specifically, or to any of our New Year's Eve events generally."

In a television interview, former New York City Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik told Newsmax TV, "There is a credible threat against the country in general by ISIS, Al Qaeda and these radical Islamic groups, that is credible. They tell us constantly they're coming, they want to do damage, they want to do harm, they want to cause death and destruction."

New York's Democratic mayor, Bill de Blasio, echoed this sentiment, saying, "Terrorists regard New York as the exact kind of place they want to disrupt..."

According to news reports, the police are preparing for a variety of possible threats, such as snipers and suicide bombers. People seeking to enter Times Square will be forced to run a gauntlet of security at 12 separate access points. Measures will include two tiers of security checkpoints at which people will be subjected to physical searches and screening by metal and radiation detectors. Plainclothes officers will be mixing with the celebrants.

James Waters, the NYPD chief of counterterrorism, stated, "You will see an increase in heavy weapons, bomb squad personnel, radiological detection teams, and our technology to include over 1,000 cameras in and around the area of Times Square for the event."

Similar measures will be taken at other New Year's Eve celebrations around the city, including fireworks

displays in Central Park and Coney Island.

Other cities such as Chicago, Miami and San Francisco are also carrying out heightened security measures for their New Year's Eve festivities, though none report specific threats. In Las Vegas, where the October 1 mass shooting, not linked to foreign terrorism, caused 58 deaths and hundreds of injuries, 300 National Guard troops and over 1,500 police will be deployed. As with New York, the DHS has raised the Las Vegas event to its highest security level.

There is an immense element of hypocrisy in the official attempts to justify such repressive and in many cases unconstitutional measures with warnings about possible terror attacks. This has been used since the launching of the "war on terror" more than 16 years ago to attack democratic rights and build up the infrastructure of a police state. The media and the entire political establishment work to accustom the population to the intrusive and menacing presence of heavily armed police in public places.

Groups like ISIS and Al Qaeda are, in fact, the direct product of US imperialist interventions in the Middle East and Central Asia. The US surreptitiously arms and supports such groups as proxy forces in its drive to impose more compliant leaders in places such as Libya and Syria through regime-change. Attacks on the US and Europe by individuals affiliated with or inspired by such groups—in virtually every case people who are well known to the police and intelligence agencies—are rooted in the massive human suffering and social destruction wrought by imperialist interventions throughout the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa.

In a city such as New York, the home of Wall Street and the financial aristocracy, on the one hand, and millions living in grinding poverty, on the other—where 60,000 people spend each night in homeless shelters and thousands more on the streets—the militarized police operation on New Year's Eve is bound up with fears within the ruling class of the growth in social opposition. It takes on the character of a dry run for mass repression and martial law.



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