

US military conducting urban warfare training exercises in Los Angeles

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The US military conducted a series of urban warfare exercises in the city of Los Angeles this week. With little in the way of advanced warning, thousands of frightened Los Angeles residents awoke to the sound of low-flying helicopters, gunfire and explosions.

In a statement released by the US Army on Monday, the day the drills began, residents were told they may hear loud noises associated with training including aircraft and weapons simulations. Almost none of the city's more than 4 million residents saw this perfunctory announcement or were otherwise made aware of the impending military operation in the second largest city in the United States.

The Army's statement justified the surprise operation explaining that the army will be "enhancing soldier skills by operating in various environments and settings. The local terrain and training facilities in Los Angeles provide the army with unique locations and simulates urban environments the service members may encounter when overseas. There is no replacement for realistic training. Each location selected enables special operations teams and flight crews to maintain maximum readiness and proficiency, validate equipment and exercise standard safety procedures."

The Los Angeles Police Department, which is coordinating with the military, publicly acknowledged the training on Tuesday while the office of Democratic Mayor Eric Garcetti has thus far said nothing about the operation.

Residents in the Lincoln Heights neighborhood shared chilling video on social media Monday night of attack helicopters flying low in formation without lights on. Some also reported that vibrations from nearby aircraft were strong enough to shake walls and household items as if in the midst of an earthquake. One resident interviewed by *NBC 4* news reported,

"People ran out of the store we were at because the store was shaking. That's how low they were flying. A woman working in a security booth ran out because she thought her booth would fall apart."

Other video posted on social media showed troops descending onto rooftops from helicopters before a series of loud explosions reverberated around the city streets. Portions of those streets were entirely blocked off for the exercise, allowing helicopters to land on main city arteries such as Wilshire Boulevard. Soldiers were subsequently deployed to conduct mock raids on nearby buildings.

In addition to helicopter formations, civilian air traffic observers noted the presence of the US Navy's P-8 Poseidon jet which flew for several hours in continuous 15-mile diameter circles above downtown Los Angeles. Operating at 20,000 feet, the plane, designed for anti-submarine warfare, anti-surface warfare and shipping interdiction, also contains a vast array of electronic surveillance equipment.

According to Navy specifications, the P-8 is equipped with a powerful high resolution electro-optical turret that can capture high definition video of surface targets and instantly stream footage via satellite feed. The aircraft was reported to have launched from Long Beach Airport, a commercial airport, rather than the nearby Point Mugu or North Island naval air stations.

The military exercises are expected to continue in the Los Angeles, Long Beach and surrounding areas through Saturday. This latest round of surprise operations follow a long line of "urban warfare" exercises carried out in major American cities beginning under the Obama administration.

These included a training exercise by the US Army's 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment in New York City last April, leading panicked residents to

flood 911 emergency phone lines, fearing a repeat of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks as soldiers were observed zip-lining across city skyscrapers.

In 2016, the US Air National Guard staged a mock “invasion” of the city of Tampa, Florida involving hundreds of soldiers, boats and attack helicopters. A year earlier, more than 1,200 US troops participated in a “super drill” across nine states in the southern half of the country including California, Utah, Colorado and Texas. This two-month long activity, code-named “Jade Helm 15,” involved special forces troops adopting civilian clothing and transportation to perform covert military activities and mock assassination raids.

Perhaps the most infamous of these urban warfare drills was the 2013 military occupation of the city of Boston in which more than a million residents were told to “shelter in place” while machine gun-mounted armored vehicles patrolled the streets supported by an armada of military aircraft. The city of Los Angeles is also no stranger to such activity as thousands of Marines carried out exercises in December 2014 in the middle of the city’s downtown area.

Now with the recent activity in Los Angeles, serious questions must once again be raised. Why is the US military conducting training exercises on domestic soil? Are preparations under way to deploy military forces in the event of civil unrest? Why has no politician at the federal, state or municipal level opposed or even question these exercises?

The military exercises are yet another expression of the terminal decline of American democracy. An active campaign is clearly under way to terrorize the American population and prepare it for the imposition of martial law. Moreover, the latest exercise arrives in the midst of a mass upsurge of strikes and working-class protests in the US and internationally.

An ongoing strike of more than 70,000 workers in the city of Matamoros, Mexico near the Texas border broke out at the same time as a strike of more than 30,000 Los Angeles teachers, which even though ultimately strangled by the United Teachers of Los Angeles, garnered the overwhelming support of the city’s residents as well as workers across the country.

These and other expressions of social unrest in the United States and internationally undoubtedly prompted US President Donald Trump in his State of the Union address Tuesday to pledge that the United

States “would never be a socialist country.” This followed promises by Trump to declare a state of emergency if funding for a border wall with Mexico is not provided by Congress.

Such measures could easily be utilized by the Trump to openly deploy the military against the civilian population. Trump has already deployed thousands of active duty soldiers to California, New Mexico, Arizona and Texas on an effectively permanent basis under the pretense of securing the US-Mexico border.

Despite claims by the mainstream media that concerns over the domestic use of troops amount to nothing more than conspiracy mongering or a traversal of the “outer edges of political paranoia” in the words of the *New York Times*, a legal framework has already been established in anticipation of such an outcome.

In 2002, the US Northern Command was established to oversee military operations within the United States. In May of 2013, the Pentagon announced new rules of engagement allowing military forces operating on American soil to provide support to local law enforcement. The Pentagon’s announcement further stated that it had the power, in the case of “emergency circumstances where prior authorization by the president is impossible and duly constituted local authorities are unable to control the situation, to engage temporarily in activities that are necessary to quell large-scale, unexpected civil disturbances.”



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