

Week-long military exercises in Los Angeles raise serious questions

Dan Conway
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Six days of military exercises concluded in Los Angeles on Saturday with action in the latter half of the week centered on the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The US military's latest urban training drill began last Monday with residents given virtually no advanced warning of low-flying helicopters and loud explosions.

The official explanation given by the military, with the full support of the police and the political establishment, was that "the local terrain and training facilities in Los Angeles provide the Army with unique locations and simulate urban environments the service members may encounter when deployed overseas."

The US military already has several MOUT, or Military Operations in Urban Terrain facilities, which are large-scale replicas of entire city blocks to simulate such environments. One of these facilities is on the Channel Islands not far from the California coast. Why, then, is the army using a fully populated city environment, the second largest city in the US no less, to conduct such exercises, when adequate training facilities are already available for such a purpose?

For that matter, even if these facilities were not adequate, why is the military allowed to conduct training drills while in the middle of millions of untrained, and for that matter, shocked and surprised civilians in the first place? The potential for injury and loss of life, accidental or otherwise, is enormous. Nonetheless the Los Angeles exercises last week were only the latest in a seemingly never-ending series of domestic military exercises carried out in the wake of the September 11 terror attacks.

These drills have taken place in nearly every large city in the United States, including Boston, Chicago, New York, Houston, San Antonio, Seattle and of course Los Angeles. The drills, although widely

opposed by the working class, have elicited virtually no comment at all from leading Democratic Party politicians, including "left" figureheads such as Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez.

After carrying out initial drills downtown, the activity in Los Angeles shifted to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach in the middle of the week. The area is of immense strategic significance for US economy. Together, the two ports process more than a third of all cargo coming into the country and support employment for more than 800,000 people.

Pictures and video revealed the presence of a small fleet of MH-6 Little Bird and MH-60 Blackhawk helicopters flying in low formation with their lights off in and around the ports. These helicopters are known to be used heavily by the 160th Special Aviation Regiment known as the Night Stalkers, which has been in operation since the 1970s. It was involved in operations in Grenada, Nicaragua, Panama and at various US imperialist incursions over the past few decades.

Civilian military observers also made note of troop equipment and uniforms consistent with the infamous Seal Team Six, responsible for the assassination of Osama bin Laden. It has been confirmed that the troops involved landed near and staged a mock infiltration of the eight-story Port of Long Beach administration building.

The exercises at the ports also included the involvement of the US Navy's P-8 Poseidon aerial surveillance plane as well as two Air Force U-28s that are designed for the same purpose.

While the military has not and will not explain why it is conducting nighttime drills at major American ports, there can be no doubt that this is part of overall plans to

quickly allow US imperialism to gain control of strategic commercial chokepoints, whether they be at home or abroad.

The military intelligence apparatus is also no doubt extremely concerned about the national security implications of the latest government shutdown. The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are heavily monitored by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), while the waterfront itself is patrolled by the US Coast Guard. Both the DHS and Coast Guard worked without pay throughout the more than 30 days of the shutdown.

Thousands of dockworkers are also becoming extremely hostile to the actions of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), which has done everything in its power to prevent a strike of dockworkers that could quickly grind the US economy to a halt. Moreover, such an action could quickly spread to truckers and oil workers, who have been isolated by the Teamsters and United Steelworkers, respectively. Even a small work slowdown at the ports in 2015 led to calls in US Congress for then-president Barack Obama to invoke the Taft-Hartley law in order to mobilize the National Guard against the dockworkers to keep the ports operating as normal.

Finally, the latest military exercises come as the Trump administration and the European powers are seeking to carry out a right-wing coup in Venezuela. The sudden seizure of Venezuelan ports would form a critical part of any overt military action by the United States and its allies. Venezuela has the largest proven oil reserves of any nation on earth.



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