

US military conducting classified operation in Washington D.C. area

E.P. Milligan
31 July 2019

A recent funding request submitted to Congress by the Army has revealed an ongoing classified military operation in the greater Washington, D.C. area. The document, originally reported by *Bloomberg News*, requested \$1.55 million for aircraft maintenance and a “Sensitive Compartmented Information Facility” at Davison Army Airfield at Fort Belvoir, Virginia 20 miles southwest of the nation’s capital. The information emerged as part of a broader \$2.5 billion request to redistribute funds to high-priority programs during the 2019 fiscal year.

The operation, whose purpose remains unknown, involves Black Hawk helicopters backed by a force of active and reserve duty soldiers of an unknown size. “Soldiers from assault helicopter company and aviation maintenance units will be supporting the mission with 10 UH-60s [Black Hawks] and maintenance capabilities for four months,” states the request. “Without additional funding, the Army will not be able to perform this classified mission.”

The carrying capacity of 10 UH-60 Black Hawks can range between 110 to 200 soldiers, depending on whether or not the soldiers are equipped with combat gear or whether or not the seats in the helicopter have been removed. There may be additional ground personnel, however.

Unlike other “realistic urban warfare” training missions now routinely carried out by the military in virtually every major American city, up until now the operation has been completely shielded from the public. It was not until the military exposed its existence in its own budget request that knowledge of the mission’s existence became publicly available. Likewise, the scope of the operation dwarfs that of training exercises, which typically span between one to six days. It reportedly began around the beginning of the 2019 fiscal year, which started on October 1, 2018—meaning it may very well already be 8 months underway.

This development raises many important questions: Why is the US military conducting long-term classified operations within spitting distance of the capital? What is the strength of the forces deployed? What particular branches of the military are involved? And, most importantly, are these

operations taking place within Washington, D.C. itself?

A long-term secret military operation involving a relatively small force in the nation’s capital during a period of growing social and political ferment points to fears within ruling class of social upheaval. It is noteworthy that the Army submitted the request for more funding within the past few days, amidst the toppling of Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló by mass protests numbering between 500,000 and 1 million people.

It is likewise no coincidence such a mission is currently taking place amidst the backdrop of an explosive ratcheting up of military tensions between the US and Iran, as well as between the US and China. Growing inter-imperialist rivalries between the US and EU countries also underscore the instability of current geopolitics.

Perhaps all the more significant is the placement of the mission. Davison Army Airfield, which historically has served as support for military aircraft carrying the US president, lies a mere 18 miles south of the White House. The operation’s designation as a “high-priority” program worthy of the reallocation of funds points to the importance of the mission’s content. Given that the US military has already mapped an escape route for President Trump out of New York City back in 2016 (see below), it is possible the current mission is intended as a response in the event of a crisis, including mass popular protests, breaking out in the capital.

The revelation in the press seems to have caught Army officials off guard. Army spokesman Wayne Hall deflected questions from *Bloomberg News* as well as military news website *Task and Purpose*, insisting that it is a “real, actual mission” the purpose of which is classified.

While Hall admitted that the mission’s end date is “undetermined,” he declined to tell *Bloomberg News* whether or not the Pentagon’s Joint Special Operations Command is involved in the exercises, a branch of the military which includes the Army’s elite Delta unit and the Navy’s Seal Team Six.

Over the past eight years, the US military have staged

dozens of “realistic” urban warfare exercises in major cities across the country. The sight of menacing attack helicopters whirring through densely populated urban areas, flak-jacketed commandos kicking down doors and throwing flash bang grenades, and the cacophony of explosions and automatic gunfire are an increasingly routine affair within the American city. As the American ruling class spirals further and further into outright recklessness, frightened residents are having their neighborhoods turned into mock war zones with little to no warning.

These drills, although widely opposed by the working class, have elicited virtually no comment at all from leading Democratic Party politicians, including “left” figures such as Senators Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders and Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Ocasio-Cortez, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America, endorsed the record \$738 billion military budget resolution in a near party-line vote in the House on Thursday.

The full scope of such urban mock war zones are, of course, unknown. A timeline of some of the most high profile operation outlined below provides a brief picture:

- Miami, Florida (April 20, 2011): A military exercise included low-altitude helicopter flights through downtown.
- Boston, Mass. (August 3, 2011): Five helicopters practiced low-altitude military exercises over the city, flying over Boston Harbor and darting in between skyscrapers in the Financial District.
- Miami (May 8, 2012): US Special Operations Command staged a “realistic urban training” exercise involving helicopters and a 100-strong force of commandos storming the Grand Bay Hotel. Residents reported hearing explosions and gunfire and witnessed flares and smoke bombs.
- Miami (January 24, 2013): A military exercise took place involving Black Hawk helicopters flying over the city and hovering over a Metrorail station while commandos rappelled onto the platform.
- Chicago (April 23-24, 2013): The US Department of Defense (DoD) conducted urban warfare training drills in Tinley Park, a southwestern suburb of the city. The operation consisted of low-flying exercises with Black Hawk and special operations helicopters. This was accompanied by ground forces simulating “building breaching,” a practice involving breaking down doors and conducting room-to-room searches. The drills were conducted one week after the police shutdown of the city of Boston following the marathon bombings.
- Operation Jade Helm, Texas (Summer 2015): Military training operation involving personnel in simulated rural and urban combat environments, spanning counties from the eastern to western border of the state. The NSA and CIA blamed the leak of information about the exercise on

“Russian bots” and warned that public information about military operations in the US would strengthen right-wing political tendencies.

- Chicago (July 20-25, 2015): Five-day military exercises were conducted involving aircraft activity, including low-altitude helicopter flights.
- Boston (August 24, 2016): The DoD conducted a military exercise in the downtown area involving low-altitude helicopter flights. Military officials insisted that the exercise was “not in response to any world events.”
- New York City (December 13, 2016): An operation in Manhattan involved one HC-130 “search-and-rescue” plane as well as two HH-60 Pave Hawk helicopters. Law enforcement officials explained the aircraft were conducting surveillance to map out potential escape routes for then president-elect Donald Trump in the event of having to evacuate him from the city.
- Boston (July 19-21, 2017): The DoD conducted another military exercise downtown with low-altitude helicopter flights, this time spanning three days. Again, officials told the public it was “not in response to any world events.”
- New York City (April 17, 2018): Lower Manhattan residents reported a six-strong fleet of low-altitude Black Hawk helicopter flights containing military personnel. No information was given by either city or military authorities.
- Chicago (September 25-26, 2018): The military conducted a special operations commandos training exercise. Residents witnessed Black Hawk helicopters flying through city and hovering above buildings while gear-clad commandos fast-rope onto rooftops.
- Miami (December 22, 2018): A Black Hawk helicopter and stealth boats holding approximately 20 personnel were spotted in Port of Miami as part of an inter-agency exercise, possibly involving both military and police.
- Los Angeles (February 4-9, 2019): The military conducted a large-scale urban drill, involving low-altitude helicopter flights and loud explosions. Initial drills took place downtown, shifting to the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach in the middle of the week.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact