

US Army Special Operations Forces conduct urban warfare exercises across Los Angeles region

Marc Wells
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Between June 3 and June 5, 2026, elite units of the United States Army Special Operations Command descended upon working-class communities across the Los Angeles metropolitan area in a series of exercises known as Military Operations in Urban Terrain.

The operations included low-flying Black Hawk helicopters, simulated weapons fire, flashbang grenades and pyrotechnic explosives detonated without meaningful public notice, throwing thousands of terrified residents into panic.

The first strikes came on the night of June 3, targeting the vacant St. Luke Medical Center in Northeast Pasadena. Army Rangers, MH-60 Black Hawks, and MH-6 Little Birds conducted rooftop insertions and sustained explosions from 8:30 p.m. until past 2:00 a.m. The city, still recovering from the devastating Eaton Fire of 2025, had been given a public notification at just 5:30 p.m., barely three hours before the explosions began.

On the night of June 4–5, blacked-out helicopters struck East Long Beach, targeting the vacant Golden Sails Hotel. Heavily armed troops rappelled onto the roof as the surrounding area erupted in simulated combat. A brief social media post appeared at 6:30 p.m., less than six hours before the operation. The facility sits less than a mile from the Tibor Rubin VA Medical Center.

In the early morning of June 5, units of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, called the “Night Stalkers,” descended on Puente Hills Mall in the City of Industry. Simultaneously, forces conducted nighttime exercises in Diamond Bar, adjacent to CalPoly Pomona, with city officials learning of the operation only after being flooded with emergency calls.

A long history of escalation precedes these developments. In April 2012, Black Hawks and Little Birds flew low-altitude tactical formations through

Chicago’s downtown skyscraper canyons. That same year, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department secretly partnered with defense contractor Persistent Surveillance Systems to conduct nine days of wide-area aerial surveillance over Compton, concealed from the city council.

In 2015, the “Jade Helm 15” exercise deployed special forces in civilian clothing across nine states. In February 2019, blacked-out Black Hawks flew formation runs through Los Angeles residential neighborhoods, landing troops on Wilshire Boulevard. These operations were real, not virtual. They demonstrated that the capitalist state was already developing the architecture of domestic military control, field-testing on American soil the counterinsurgency methods drawn directly from Iraq and Afghanistan.

But they were preparatory. They were conducted under administrations (Democratic and Republican alike) that still operated within certain procedural constraints. What has changed is not the existence of this infrastructure but the social and political conditions under which it is being deployed.

The intensification of the class struggle, reflected in strikes, mounting social opposition and growing resistance to inequality, found its political expression within the ruling class in the rise of Trump and the consolidation of oligarchic forms of rule.

The infrastructure built in Compton and Chicago has now been placed in the hands of a government that in June of last year deployed 4,000 National Guard troops and 700 Marines against Los Angeles, occupied Washington DC, and mobilized troops to support federal agents in Minneapolis, Portland and Chicago, not to enforce the law against suspected criminals, but to flex the muscle of militarization.

Internal Army documents, leaked and published by journalist Ken Klippenstein, exposed that last July's Operation Excalibur in MacArthur Park—in which 90 National Guard soldiers and dozens of federal agents descended on a working-class immigrant neighborhood—had a stated mission not of enforcing any specific law but precisely that: to demonstrate “the capacity and freedom of maneuver of federal law enforcement.”

The counterinsurgency methods developed in Baghdad and Kabul, rehearsed over the years in Compton and on Wilshire Boulevard, are now being test-run as a matter of deliberate policy by an oligarchic government whose target is the working class.

Los Angeles is a city of acute and growing class conflict. In April 2025, more than 55,000 Los Angeles County workers went on strike. In early 2026, about 77,000 LAUSD employees (Los Angeles Unified School District) were poised to strike before union bureaucrats intervened to cancel the action, a betrayal that itself reflects the ruling class's acute fear of working-class power. The communities targeted by the military exercises are the neighborhoods in which these workers live.

The domestic military buildup is directly connected to the international war drive. As WSWS International Editorial Board Chairman David North stated at the May Day 2026 rally, the same crisis of capitalism that drives the oligarchy toward fascism and authoritarian rule at home drives it toward military violence and the redivision of the world abroad.

Under Secretary of War Pete Hegseth, the Trump administration has launched the “Drone Dominance Program,” a \$1 billion initiative to purchase over 340,000 attack and surveillance drones, the same assets being rehearsed over Long Beach and Pasadena. The \$1.5 trillion military budget requested for 2027 is, as North stated plainly, “a budget for world war.” The working class in Los Angeles confronts the same state apparatus that is bombing Iran, funding genocide in Gaza, and occupying Washington D.C.

The danger is not only political but immediate and physical. In January 2025, a US Army MH-60 Black Hawk conducting a domestic training exercise over Washington D.C., collided with American Airlines Flight 5342, killing all 67 people aboard both aircraft. The NTSB determined the disaster was “entirely preventable.” The Pentagon's response was to make minor adjustments to flight paths, allowing operations of exactly this

character to proceed in Los Angeles a year later.

The response of California's Democratic establishment was perfunctory. Mayor Karen Bass made theatrical gestures of opposition. Governor Gavin Newsom positions himself as a defender of California's communities. But Pasadena's own officials acknowledged they had no authority over the exercises. The City of Industry and Diamond Bar received no notice at all.

This is not political miscalculation on the Democrats' part. It flows directly from what the Democratic Party is: a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus. California's supposed sanctuary laws are riddled with loopholes permitting continued ICE cooperation. Democratic congressional leaders voted to fund Trump's \$839 billion military budget, which pays for these forces deployed domestically. The Democratic Party functions not as an opposition but as an enabler of the Trump administration.

The working class cannot afford illusions about who will defend it or what is required. Appeals to Democratic politicians who fund and enable the military-intelligence apparatus lead nowhere. Reliance on union bureaucracies which have already demonstrated their role—canceling a planned strike of 77,000 LAUSD workers at the precise moment workers were poised to act—leads nowhere.

What is required is the construction of rank-and-file committees, independent of and in opposition to the union bureaucracies, capable of mobilizing the class power of working people.

The fight against domestic militarization is inseparable from the fight against imperialist war, and both require the same answer: the building of an international socialist movement of the working class. The working class must answer ruling class militarization and authoritarianism with the only force capable of stopping them: its own conscious, organized and internationally united political power.



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