

New York City police deploy new counterterrorism unit

By Sandy English
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The political establishment in New York City is using the November 13 attacks in Paris to justify the further militarization of the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

At a media event last Monday, the city's Democratic Mayor, Bill de Blasio, and Police Commissioner William Bratton announced the formation of the new counterterrorism unit called the Critical Response Command (CRC), comprised of more than 500 officers. De Blasio emphasized "how critical it is to have our own capacity to deal with each and every situation." The creation of the new unit has been in the works for months.

About 100 CRC cops will be on duty at all times. The unit will be headquartered at Randall's Island, which offers quick access to all five of the city's boroughs. Randall's Island is also where the NYPD conducted riot training during the Occupy Wall Street protests in 2011.

CRC teams will be equipped with special cars that can hold Colt M4 semiautomatic long rifles. The CRC, as the *New York Times* noted, will also be trained to "conduct undercover 'hostile surveillance' to detect those who might be gathering information about potential targets, and the use of new devices."

On Thursday the new unit held training maneuvers in the city's subway system with other agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security. The mock scenario included terrorists with automatic weapons and suicide vests. One hundred CRC cops will be present at the annual Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade on Thursday.

In line with a number of officials and former officials in the federal military-intelligence apparatus, Bratton also called last week for eliminating restrictions on police surveillance in New York. "The [offensive] in

our case is intelligence, the gathering of intelligence, nobody does it better than the NYPD and our partnership with the FBI," he told the media. Promoting the campaign against the use of encryption software he noted: "We encounter that all the time. We're monitoring and they go dark. They go on to sites that we cannot access."

The CRC joins other specialized heavily armed NYPD units, such as the 800-member Strategic Response Group comprised of patrol officers, and the 700 cops in the Emergency Service Unit, the NYPD's SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) team. In the last few months, the NYPD has roughly tripled the number of officers armed with high-powered semi-automatic rifles.

The NYPD also operates a massive spying apparatus of thousands of cops that includes the Intelligence Division and the Counterterrorism Unit. The notorious Demographic Unit that spied on Muslims at mosques, restaurants and other businesses after the terrorist attacks of 2001 was a part of the Intelligence Division. Combined, these units have offices in 11 cities worldwide.

This year the de Blasio administration supported several increases in funding for the NYPD, one of which included the hiring of 1,000 more cops, "that will be focused on counter-terrorism and crowd management," as Bratton told NBC's Meet the Press yesterday.

Bratton's reference to "crowd management" is significant, and hints at the real purposes behind the increasing militarization of the NYPD.

There were frequent and sometimes massive protests against police violence late last year and early this year—provoked by longstanding grievances with the police that had been building for years, and especially

by the refusal of a grand jury to indict Daniel Pantaleo, the cop who choked to death Staten Island resident Eric Garner in July 2014. Demonstrators have noted the presence of NYPD officers wearing jackets that identified them as members of special counterterrorism units.

In January Bratton confirmed the NYPD's intention to deploy militarized police against these and other peaceful protesters when he announced plans to form a heavily armed counterterrorism unit to "deal with events like our recent protests."

This was entirely in line with the character of NYPD intimidation against the non-violent Occupy Wall Street protesters in lower Manhattan in late 2011. Demonstrators were besieged by hundreds of police every day, who filmed them, pepper-sprayed them, used sound cannons to disperse them, and eventually expelled them from their encampment in Zuccotti Park.

The reemergence of thousands of protesters on the streets of New York City in the last few years has been brought about by increasingly precarious social conditions for millions of New Yorkers. Rents have skyrocketed, wages have declined, real unemployment remains in the double digits, and the behavior of the NYPD itself has only increased the social volatility.

Last week the *New York Times* and Siena College conducted a survey of New Yorkers, which noted that half of those polled "say they are struggling economically, making ends meet just barely, if at all, and most feel sharp uncertainty about the future of the city's next generation."

Thirty-three percent of residents in the Bronx and 25 percent of residents in Brooklyn, the two poorest boroughs, said, "the prospects for finding a job are poor," and 44 and 36 percent in each borough respectively said, "the chance that a family member will be incarcerated is very likely or almost certain."

Twenty-one percent citywide said that there had been times in the last 12 months when they did not have enough money to buy food for themselves or their family, and 66 percent citywide said that local government's responsiveness to the needs of their neighborhood was fair or poor. Even in the less socially polarized borough of Staten Island, 46 percent of respondents said that life was getting worse.

Such sentiments will produce a response by millions, and the NYPD and other police agencies are arming

and training elite and specialized forces to protect the privileges of the handful of multimillionaires and billionaires who rule the city.

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