

# America's paramilitary police

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Last week, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) published a report, *War Comes Home: The Excessive Militarization of American Policing*, which provides a chilling account of the role of the US military in arming “paramilitary police” squads throughout the country.

SWAT teams are now routinely deployed for regular police work—including the serving of warrants for nonviolent offenses. Raids by SWAT teams, typically carried out in the dead of night, often involve the use of military stun grenades, the wanton destruction of property, the killing of household pets, and, with increasing regularity, the deaths of “suspects” and their family members, including children. More than one hundred and twenty such raids take place in America every day.

Constitutional protections, including the prohibition against unreasonable searches and seizures, are ignored with the now ubiquitous use of “no-knock” warrants.

A series of federal government programs have been set up to encourage the militarization of local police forces. The motto of one Defense Department program, which has transferred more than \$4.3 billion in military hardware to police departments, sums up the intent: “From war fighter to crime fighter.” In other words, the tactics of military aggression abroad are being employed for domestic repression.

A shocking amount of military equipment has been recommissioned for use in the United States, without any political discussion or oversight. SWAT teams have been equipped with 500 Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles, which can withstand roadside bombs and are capable of mounting heavy machine guns and automatic grenade launchers. They have been provisioned with combat uniforms, night-vision goggles, sniper and assault rifles, belt-fed machine guns and military helicopters, including the infamous Black Hawk and Huey.

The militarization of domestic policing is one symptom of a deeply dysfunctional society. While the political establishment never loses the opportunity to declare there is no money for social needs—education, pensions, health care, nutrition—billions of dollars are made available to equip the police with the latest instruments of violence.

In the United States, every social problem is treated as a police matter. The United States imprisons more people than all other developed countries combined. This monstrous system, which sweeps up hundreds of thousands of people every year, is crowned by the continuing practice of capital punishment, which is banned throughout the rest of the developed world.

Police increasingly believe, with good reason, that they can act with impunity. Recent months have seen a spate of police killings. Those that happen to have been caught on video—like the March shooting of a homeless man in Albuquerque, New Mexico—have provoked widespread popular outrage. But such acts are regular occurrences in the United States.

The United States bears more and more the character of a garrison state. The border regions of the country have been turned into de facto military zones, where constitutional rights are a dead letter. Military drones have already made their appearance in American skies, and plans are in place for their much more widespread utilization. There is a concerted effort to accustom the American people to the presence of police and soldiers armed to the teeth—at airports, train stations, schools, sports stadiums, etc.

Militarized police are part of a massive state apparatus that operates largely outside of any legal or democratic supervision and tramples on the population's constitutional and democratic rights every day. Domestic policing is increasingly integrated with the array of NSA spying programs that monitor the movements, communications and intimate personal

details of the population.

The militarization of American society was most graphically revealed in the lockdown of Boston last year in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings—in which the city’s residents were told to “shelter in place” as squads of police in combat fatigues, armed with assault rifles, conducted house-to-house searches. This event—and the subsequent state murder of Ibragim Todashev—have passed without a note of protest from within the political establishment or media.

The buildup of an apparatus of mass repression is bound up with unrestrained military violence and extreme social inequality. Abroad, the American ruling class is in a state of permanent war. The invasion of country after country in the pursuit of the interests of the financial aristocracy cannot but reverberate at home.

The wars are carried out by a gigantic military apparatus—funded to the tune of \$1 trillion a year—that has no more respect for the democratic rights of the population of the United States than it does for the populations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya or Syria. And presiding over the entire edifice is a president who is a self-acknowledged killer, having systematically planned and overseen the drone missile murder of at least four American citizens, in addition to thousands of others.

Plunder abroad has been accompanied by plunder at home. While the median household income plunged by 8 percent between 2007 and 2012, the wealth of the super-rich has more than doubled since 2009. The financial oligarchy that dominates American society derives its wealth largely through criminal and semi-criminal activities, including the types of speculation, fraud, and parasitism that led to the 2008 financial meltdown.

The creation of the framework of a police state in the United States reflects a ruling class that lives in perpetual fear over the preservation of its wealth and privilege. It is well aware that its policies— foreign and domestic—are creating mass hostility to its rule.



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