

Compton, California, school police to carry assault rifles

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The paramilitary siege of Ferguson, Missouri in recent weeks has underscored the extent to which the police in the United States have become more and more militarized. The school police of Compton, a working-class community of 100,000 in Los Angeles, are keeping up with this disturbing trend. In July, the school board of Compton Unified passed a policy that would allow school police to carry semi-automatic AR-15 assault rifles in their patrol car trunks while on duty.

The immediate justification for more firepower in the hands of school police was the threat of a mass shooting or a terrorist attack. In reality, arming school police to the teeth is designed to accustom working-class communities like Compton to a militarized police presence and ultimately to suppress any opposition to the status quo.

Not surprisingly, the news that Compton school police will be armed with AR-15 rifles has angered many in the impoverished area, where schools are starved for funds, unemployment is high, and the social infrastructure is crumbling. Francisco Orozco, a graduate of Dominguez High School and founder of the Compton Democratic Club, told Southern California Public Radio, "The school police has been very notorious in the community and in reality has never had to shoot anyone before. So this escalation of weapons we feel is very unnecessary." He added, "The school police has not even earned the right to carry handguns."

Indeed, the Compton Unified Police were the subject of a lawsuit filed by parents last year alleging racial profiling by some police officers, in addition to recent allegations that they have used excessive force against students. Compton, it should be noted, was also where the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department used a small Cessna plane for nine days in 2012 to conduct

surveillance on the entire population using high-powered cameras without a search warrant.

Compton Unified is not the only school district in the United States with heavily armed school police. Eight other districts in California alone already use AR-15 rifles, including Los Angeles, Santa Ana, Baldwin Park, and Fontana. They have also been approved in districts in Topeka, Kansas; Gainesville, Florida; and Granite, Utah.

School and police authorities routinely exploit fears of a mass shooting on campus to justify beefing up the armed police presence at schools. If a school shooting does not actually happen, the very threat of one is seized upon to implement these changes.

In a recent incident at South Pasadena High School, also in the Los Angeles area, two teenagers were arrested for allegedly plotting to shoot teachers and students at their school. No weapons were found by police, but this has not stopped them from seizing on the incident as a pretext to mobilize extra police at the start of the new school year.

The 16-year-old and 17-year-old, whose names have been withheld because they are minors, have been charged on suspicion of conspiracy and making criminal threats against another teenager. The younger boy's stepfather, Viken Bazerkanian, defended his son against the accusations, saying, "Our son wasn't trying to kill the whole school.... He had no intention of going to the school and actually harming the people that he loves."

South Pasadena Unified School District authorities told police about the alleged plot, who then conducted "online surveillance" via social media such as Skype, obtained warrants, and arrested the two boys three days before school started. Pasadena police were forced to admit that there was no official date the plot was

supposed to take place. Police confiscated two computers that allegedly confirmed their suspicions of a “very, very viable” massacre. The teens allegedly researched how to fire and assemble guns and weapons and how to disarm people including police.

South Pasadena police chief Arthur Miller told news media that the only weapon the boys actually had any conceivable access to was a handgun that belonged to one of the boys’ out-of-state relatives.



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