

California residents speak out against militarization of Davis police department

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At a Davis, California city council meeting held on August 26, residents spoke out against the local police department's recent acquisition of a Mine-Resistant, Ambush-Protected (MRAP) vehicle.

A recent departmental staff report revealed that the federal government has, through its 1033 program, transferred to the Davis police a range of surplus military equipment, including binoculars, sets of body armor, riot helmets, camouflage nets, M16A1 and M14 rifles and are now transferring an MRAP.

Police chief Landy Black used the prior transfer of military hardware to justify the retention by the Davis Police Department of the MRAP. Black cited multiple local incidents involving armed suspects whom he claimed had "broken with [their] sensibilities" or were "having a problem with reality." These events, he argued, warranted the use of the MRAP, which would be used only in what he vaguely termed "hazardous or hostile environments".

The MRAP is not designed to deal with individual armed suspects, but rather with the suppression of masses of people, a fact which the residents who spoke out at the meeting clearly addressed.

During the public comment section of the city council meeting, resident Naomi stated "it concerned me that [police chief Black's] description of the lawful exercise of our first amendment rights was described as an 'incident' that needed to be 'managed'".

Extrapolating on these concerns, David said "I think that the growing trend of the militarization of police is a huge problem in our country. When I turn on the news or read a story online, where do these things show up? Peaceful protests. History has shown that time and time again, whether it's in Davis, Oakland, Ferguson, Egypt."

Others drew out how domestic policing policies

paralleled American foreign policy. "Every time we turn on the news," Karen said, "we see the streets of Ferguson and how they've been militarized... And it's a very graphic example of the war being brought home against us."

Responding to the connections being drawn between Davis and Ferguson, Black lamented that the timing of the acquisition of the MRAP was "amazingly unfortunate."

He stated, "Like so many situations where police conduct has been examined and has been publicized, [the events in Ferguson] gives law enforcement a black eye."

Addressing the 2011 pepper spraying of peaceful protesters by UC Davis Police Lieutenant John Pike, Black made the extraordinary statement that the incident "hardly made the news because we were so low-key." In reality, the shocking footage of the brutality of the police against the seated and unarmed students was reported internationally, with workers around the world expressing solidarity with the pepper-sprayed protesters.

The city council passed a resolution which gave explicit directions to the police to return the MRAP to the military, with one opposing vote. Council member Brett Lee voted to retain the MRAP, stating "If there's a situation where somebody is distraught over losing their job, they're known to be armed, they've taken a few pot shots at a neighbor walking their dog out front, that's when this vehicle would be used."



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