

# Obama backs continued militarization of local police forces

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President Obama held a series of White House meetings with cabinet members, police commanders and official “civil rights” leaders Monday aimed at diffusing popular anger over the whitewash of the police murder of Ferguson, Missouri teenager Michael Brown and the military-style repression of protesters in the St. Louis suburb that followed.

The major initiative coming out of the meetings was the president’s announcement that he would maintain, with certain cosmetic adjustments, the federal program that has armed local police departments with surplus military equipment from the Iraq and Afghan wars.

The scope of the so-called 1033 program came to light during the initial protests following the murder of Brown last August. The world witnessed tanks rolling down the streets of an American city, police threatening to shoot residents with automatic weapons, the implementation of a no-fly zone to block news helicopters from filming mass arrests and the suspension of First Amendment freedoms of speech and association.

In typical Orwellian fashion, Obama said, “I do not want a militarized police culture in America” even as he approved the continuation of the urban warfare program, which the White House says has delivered 460,000 pieces of “controlled property” to domestic police forces, including 92,442 small arms, 44,275 night vision devices, 5,235 Humvees, 617 mine-resistant vehicles and 616 aircraft.

According to press reports, the White House specifically rejected any legislation that would block state and local police from receiving certain items like M-16 rifles and mine-resistant ambush protected, or MRAP, vehicles. White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest cited the response to the Boston Marathon bombing—i.e., the lockdown of a major American city

by militarized police—as one example of the “proper” deployment of such equipment.

This assertion of continued police militarization was packaged with efforts to bring “community leaders” on board. To “fortify the trust that must exist between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve,” the White House said, the president would draft an executive order “directing relevant agencies to work together and with law enforcement and civil rights and civil liberties organizations to develop specific recommendations within 120 days.”

What was needed, the White House claimed, was “more transparency” and local civilian review of military arms purchases to ensure that all equipment “has a legitimate civilian law enforcement purpose.” Law enforcement agencies should be required to provide “after-action analysis reports for significant incidents involving federally provided or federally-funded equipment.”

In addition to the repackaging of the 1033 program, the president announced the administration would seek Congressional approval for a three-year \$263 million program “to increase use of body-worn cameras for police, expand training for law enforcement agencies, add more resources for police department reform, and multiply the number of cities where the DOJ (Department of Justice) facilitates community and local law enforcement agencies engagement.”

The main aim of these measures is to establish a closer integration between local police and the military and federal agencies.

The president also said he would issue an executive order creating a “Task Force on 21st Century Policing” to expand “Community Oriented Policing Services” and would propose “how to promote effective crime reduction while building public trust.” The Task Force

will be co-chaired by Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles H. Ramsey.

Ramsey is notorious for trampling over democratic rights. When chief of the Washington, DC police force, he set up traffic checkpoints to stop motorists who had not broken any laws and to enter information about them into a police database. He also oversaw the mass arrests of anti-International Monetary Fund protesters in 2002 that were later ruled a violation of the Fourth Amendment. According to testimony at a trial where he was personally held responsible, Ramsey gave the arrest order, saying, “We’re going to lock them up and teach them a lesson.”

The response to the mass protests that followed Michael Brown’s murder has been the establishment of new “rules of engagement” for the police-military repression of the American people. In the upside-down world of the Obama administration, the arming of police departments around the country for the violent suppression of social opposition is palmed off as an expansion of civil rights.

In order to conceal the real character of these measures, the president is relying on the services of the media and the corrupt “civil rights” establishment to couch the issue of police brutality entirely in racial, not class, terms.

Accompanied by Rev. Al Sharpton, New York Mayor Bill de Blasio and Ferguson protest leaders anxious to be integrated in the president’s plans, Obama suggested that the further integration of police forces, community policing programs and sensitivity training could overcome “the simmering distrust that exists between too many police departments and too many communities of color.”

Well aware of the deep skepticism of minority and working class youth, Obama concluded his remarks with a “cautionary note.” He acknowledged that “there have been task forces and conversations before and nothing happens. Why is this different this time? Because the president of the US is deeply invested.”

Sharpton echoed the fraudulent claim that an African American president and attorney general were uniquely prepared to respond to the victims of police brutality. He called the White House event “a historic meeting” where “the president and vice president sat with all of us and law enforcement to commit to not just another commitment, another study... but to put his full weight

behind it.” Sharpton, a multi-millionaire, added, “We live in a country that we must support law enforcement, but law enforcement must support justice.”

In reality, Obama and Holder have overseen a vast intensification of the attack on democratic rights, from domestic spying to assassinating American citizens without due process. Now the methods of the war on terror that the administration has utilized overseas are being brought home and targeted ever more directly against the working class.



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