

Obama's paramilitary police: The "war on terror" comes home

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The most significant outcome of the series of meetings with cabinet officials, police officers and "civil rights" leaders organized by the Obama administration on Monday was the president's rejection of any measures to rein in the militarization of local police forces.

The meetings were held to provide the appearance of sympathy for popular anger over the failure to bring charges against the Ferguson, Missouri police officer who shot and killed unarmed teenager Michael Brown last August. But the reality was the opposite of the rhetoric.

A White House review of programs for transferring military equipment to the police concluded: "These programs, in the main, have been valuable and have provided state and local law enforcement with needed assistance as they carry out their critical missions in helping to keep the American people safe." The review, ordered in the aftermath of the police crackdown against peaceful Ferguson protesters in August, was released on Monday.

Obama made clear that there would be no reduction in funding for the Defense Department's 1033 Program, whose motto is "from warfighter to crimefighter," or any of the other federal programs that have facilitated the arming of local law enforcement with over \$4.3 billion in assault rifles, armored vehicles, and even military aircraft.

With every passing year, the line between the police and the military becomes increasingly blurred, as police are outfitted with gear that in many cases comes straight from a battlefield. The use of paramilitary SWAT teams has grown exponentially in recent decades, with police—wearing battle armor and toting assault rifles—carrying out tasks such as serving search warrants. SWAT raids, accompanied by wanton violence and the destruction of property, have become standard operating procedure.

In Ferguson, police SWAT teams have functioned alongside the National Guard in carrying out mass arrests,

setting a precedent for joint military-police operations to suppress domestic political opposition.

In his trademark Orwellian fashion, Obama sought to palm off the expansion of police-state measures as a "civil rights" initiative. Grotesque levels of deceit and hypocrisy are par for the course for this president.

"Too many individuals, particularly young people of color, do not feel as if they are being treated fairly," Obama declared following his meetings on Monday. Thus, the problem is not that police abuse and violence, often fatal, are daily occurrences in cities and towns across America, but that the victims haven't reconciled themselves to such treatment.

The solution? Obama concluded his remarks by declaring that he would introduce new initiatives that "will significantly expand funding and training for local law enforcement."

His proposal to set up a "Task Force on 21st Century Policing" was taken from the same playbook the White House employed in response to the NSA spying scandal in 2013. Then, the administration used a review panel charged with increasing "transparency" and rebuilding "public trust" to systematize and expand unconstitutional government spying.

Prominent liberal academics and pro-Democratic Party publications such as the *Nation* magazine were enlisted to present the fraud of NSA "reform" as the real thing and conceal the reality of ever expanding and more deeply institutionalized police-state methods.

The identical tactics are being used in response to the police murder of Michael Brown and exoneration of his killer. Obama calls for restoring "public trust" in the police by increasing "transparency," even as his administration works hand in glove with state and local authorities to impose a virtual state of siege in Ferguson.

The administration utilizes racial and identity politics to cover up the fundamental democratic and political issues.

It has made Al Sharpton, the multimillionaire talk show host and tax cheat, its de facto spokesman in St. Louis, and recruited a host of “civil rights leaders” in an attempt to keep opposition to police violence within the confines of the Democratic Party.

The assault on basic democratic rights and increasing resort to state repression represent the response of the US financial aristocracy to the growth of social tensions. Six years after the 2008 financial crash, mass unemployment continues while workers’ wages stagnate. The wealth of the super-rich, meanwhile, has more than doubled since 2009.

The ruling class and both corporate-controlled political parties have nothing to propose to alleviate the social distress of broad sections of the population. There is no section of the political establishment calling for restraints on corporate criminality or a more democratic redistribution of wealth. Rather, both parties are pressing for ever-deeper attacks on social welfare programs. This is accompanied by an escalation of deeply unpopular wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, with preparations for even more bloody wars in the near future.

The militarization of the police is not about “keeping the American people safe,” as claimed by the White House. It is about strengthening the apparatus of repression and directing it against social and political opposition within the United States.

It is the “war on terror” come home. The counterinsurgency methods developed for wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan are increasingly being employed against the American people.

Democracy is incompatible with existing levels of social inequality, which are themselves rooted in the capitalist system. Democratic rights can be defended only on the basis of a mass movement of the working class armed with a socialist program to meet social needs, not increase corporate profits and the fortunes of the rich and super-rich.



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