

In wake of latest atrocity

Obama administration whitewashes police killings

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Only one day after the world was shocked and horrified by the release of a bystander video showing Los Angeles police murdering yet another unarmed man in broad daylight, the Obama administration's Task Force on 21st Century Policing released its interim report, offering a handful of toothless recommendations that amount to a green light for police violence and murder.

In December, in the wake of mass protests against the police killings of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York and 12-year-old Tamir Rice in Cleveland, Ohio, the Obama administration announced it was establishing the task force to "strengthen the relationships between local police and the communities they are supposed to protect and serve."

Apologists for the Obama administration such as Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson sought to present the task force, together with federal investigations into several high-profile police killings, as evidence that the White House was seriously seeking to bring killer cops to justice and put a halt to police brutality.

From the beginning, however, Obama made clear that the task force would have no real power. It was staffed with many former and current police officials, including Philadelphia Police Commissioner Charles Ramsey, who functioned as its co-chair.

At the same time as it announced the creation of the task force, the administration released a report endorsing federal programs that have transferred billions of dollars in military-grade hardware from the Pentagon to local police agencies.

In establishing the task force, Obama implied that the fundamental problem was not that police murdered

hundreds of people every year, but that the population did not sufficiently support the police. He decried the "distrust that exists between too many police departments and too many communities of color."

In announcing the task force's findings on Monday, Obama declared that this distrust "means we're not as effective in fighting crime as we could be." He called the task force report "a great opportunity, coming out of some great conflict and tragedy," to make "our law enforcement officers feel, rather than being embattled, feel fully supported."

The recommendations in the report are in line with this goal of defending and strengthening the police. There are no proposals for significant nationwide legal or administrative measures to rein in the police. Rather, there is a laundry list of recommendations for law enforcement agencies to carry out or ignore, entirely at their pleasure.

These include calling on local police departments to implement "outside" investigations of police killings by referring probes to "neighboring jurisdictions or to the next higher levels of government." This would mean in practice shifting investigations to other police-friendly agencies and jurisdictions.

There are no demands that killer cops or their superiors be held criminally or legally accountable for the deaths and injuries they inflict. There are no demands for the removal of officials guilty of whitewashing police killings, such as Robert McCulloch, the St. Louis County prosecutor who rigged the grand jury proceedings to prevent the indictment of Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson, the killer of Michael Brown.

The task force report notes that there is no mandatory

federal database of police killings, and that the submission of this information by local police to the federal government is voluntary. Its response to this scandalous situation is merely to urge police departments to be more forthcoming with data.

The only substantial nationwide proposal is for the creation of a federal “Law Enforcement Diversity Initiative” to encourage the hiring of minority police officers. This is aimed at giving ammunition to the White House’s apologists, who will hail the proposal as evidence that the White House is “sensitive” to the needs of minority communities.

It is in line with the administration’s attempt to define the nationwide epidemic of police killings of unarmed people—white as well as black—as a racial question, obscuring the more fundamental class issues.

It is noteworthy that the central premise of the task force—that the problem is a “lack of trust” between the police and the population, is the same as that advanced by Obama following the exposure of massive, illegal spying on the American people by the National Security Agency. The task, Obama declared at that time, was to restore the trust of the American people in the NSA and other police and intelligence agencies.

Obama established a task force, packed with defenders of the NSA, to look into the issue and make recommendations. The result was a series of toothless proposals that in no way challenged the “right” of the NSA to violate the Constitution and intercept the communications of every single person in the US and tens of millions more around the world. The result is a level of mass surveillance today that is, if anything, even more pervasive than when the spying revelations emerged two years ago.

It will be no different with the policing task force and the epidemic of police killings.

The White House report is the product of a calculated political operation that began with the eruption of protests following the killing of Michael Brown last August. The administration responded by backing the police-military crackdown carried out by the local authorities, while carrying out maneuvers aimed at tamping down public outrage.

After the sham grand jury proceedings that exonerated Wilson, the White House announced a “civil rights” investigation. Predictably, the Justice Department has, according to media reports, found no

grounds to bring charges against Wilson.

Since the killing of Brown, more than six hundred more people have been killed by police, according to an online compilation of local media reports. The murders of Brown, Garner and others, followed by the exoneration of the killer cops, sparked nationwide protests. But what have been the results?

The police have been given a virtual license to kill, secure in the knowledge that they will not be prosecuted. Meanwhile, hundreds of people have been arrested for protesting and dozens detained for posting criticisms of the police on social media.

The basic lesson is that democratic rights—including the right to live—cannot be defended by appealing to or relying on Congress, the courts, the Democratic Party or any other official institution. Basic rights can be defended only through an independent political movement of the working class in opposition to the existing economic and political system, that is, on the basis of a socialist program.

The endless series of sociopathic police killings expresses something much deeper than the individual psyches of the backward people recruited by the state to do its dirty work. These killings are ultimately an expression of the cancerous growth of social inequality, which is intrinsic to capitalism and the corporate and financial aristocracy that runs America.



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