

Obama's paramilitary police

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On Monday, US President Barack Obama travelled to Camden, New Jersey, America's poorest city, to praise its brutal police department and reaffirm his support for federal programs that have transferred billions of dollars in military hardware to local police departments.

Reports of police brutality by Camden cops have nearly doubled since 2011, and last year Camden had substantially more reported brutality complaints than Jersey City, which has four times more people.

"This city is on to something," Obama declared, referring to Camden.

America's major news outlets, which function as little more than state propaganda outlets, could be counted on to report the exact opposite of reality. According to the *New York Times*, Obama used his visit to "crack down on overly aggressive police tactics," and "limit ... military-style equipment for police forces."

These claims are based on Obama's announcement that the White House will no longer transfer a small range of highly-specialized military assets to local police departments, including bayonets, .50 caliber rifles and tracked fighting vehicles.

These types of ordnance are, from a military counterinsurgency standpoint, either obsolete or inappropriate. The US Army, for example, has dropped bayonet training for recruits, while .50 caliber rifles are generally not considered anti-personnel weapons. They are used instead to target communications systems, grounded aircraft and radar installations, meaning that no sensible anti-civilian death squad would carry them.

Other restrictions proposed by Obama are almost entirely meaningless. The *Times* reports that the list of prohibited items includes "camouflage uniforms," but a quick glance at the White House document outlining the proposals notes that the restriction does not include "woodland or desert patterns or solid color uniforms,"

i.e., the great majority of US military combat uniforms.

Obama's order explicitly permits the provision of wheeled armored combat vehicles known as MRAPs, as well as assault and sniper rifles, belt-fed machine guns and military aircraft and helicopters.

In fact, essentially none of the hardware deployed by militarized police during the crackdown on peaceful protests in Ferguson, Missouri last year falls under the White House's prohibitions.

Recent deployments of combat weapons by local police forces have been criticized by sections of the military, which chided the unprofessional character with which police handled their weapons while cracking down on mass demonstrations. Monday's announcement is the administration's response to such criticisms: the ordnance transferred to local police will now be more closely monitored, and police will be better trained to use it.

In other words, use of combat weapons by the police will be institutionalized, regularized, and made *more* like the military, not less.

Together with the new police militarization guidelines, Obama announced an additional \$163 million in funding for local police forces, with a large share of the funds targeted for training police to use military hardware.

Obama's announcement was also timed to correspond with the release of a report by his so-called Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which issued a set of non-binding recommendations for local police departments to rebuild "community trust."

The actual content of these proposals, however, can be seen in Camden, which recently overhauled its police department to implement "community policing" practices, cracking down on minor crimes and responding to opposition with extreme violence. As a result, arrests for minor offenses soared, with citations for broken taillights increasing by more than 300

percent, according to the ACLU. Reports of police brutality also increased sharply.

In his remarks, Obama offered effusive praise for the police, declaring, “The overwhelming number of police officers are good, fair, honest and care deeply about their community, putting their lives on the line every day.”

These remarks were aimed at solidarizing the White House with the police amid a continuing wave of violence directed against the population, giving rise to protests in St. Louis, New York City, Baltimore and other cities. Through the end of April, police killed 392 people in the US, putting them on track to take significantly more lives in 2015 than even the 1,100 they killed last year.

Every year, cops kill more people in the United States than the number of US soldiers killed in Iraq in 2004, at the height of the conflict.

This reign of police murder and violence takes place with the full support of the Obama administration, which has transferred billions of dollars in military armaments to local police, while working behind the scenes with local authorities to acquit killer cops, such as Darren Wilson, who killed Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri and Daniel Pantaleo, the killer of Eric Garner in Staten Island.

Even while working to shield cops from prosecution, the White House has helped to coordinate the military/police crackdown on peaceful demonstrators in Ferguson, Missouri in 2014, and in Baltimore last month.

The ultimate root of the ongoing wave of police violence and the militarization of society is the pervasive growth of social inequality. Camden, with 40 percent of its residents below the poverty line, embodies the disastrous impoverishment of the American working class that has taken place over the past several decades. The fact that Obama chose this city to tout his proposals on more aggressive policing expresses the fundamental reality that the ruling class has no answer to poverty besides ever-greater police repression.

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