

Obama Justice Department reaches settlement with Cleveland, Ohio over police brutality

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The city of Cleveland, Ohio has agreed to a settlement with the US Justice Department over allegations that Cleveland police regularly brutalize and kill residents in violation of the US Constitution, the *New York Times* reported Monday.

The settlement, which could be publicly announced as early as Tuesday, follows Saturday's acquittal of Michael Brelo, the Cleveland police officer who shot two unarmed people in 2012 at point-blank range while standing on the hood of their car.

The *Times* report, whose release was no doubt closely coordinated with the White House, claimed that "the details of the settlement were not immediately clear, but in similar talks in recent years, the Justice Department has required cities to allow independent monitors to oversee changes in police departments. Settlements are typically backed by court orders and often call for improved training and revised policies for the use of force."

In other words, the settlement will likely be entirely toothless, with no one held to account for systematic and grave violations of the Constitution, including a series of gruesome police murders of which the 2012 shooting was only one example.

The expected wrist-slap settlement for the police department comes after a Justice Department investigation detailed damning evidence of abuse and brutality such as "unnecessary and excessive use of deadly force, including shootings and head strikes with impact weapons" and "unnecessary, excessive or retaliatory use of less lethal force including Tasers, chemical spray and fists."

The report, released December 4 by the Justice Department, said that Cleveland Police Department (CPD) officers view themselves as part of "an occupying force." One police district station was found with a mock

sign suggesting that the facility is similar to a military outpost, identifying it as a "forward operating base." The report provided 16 examples of unnecessary use of force by CDP personnel, including using a Taser against a deaf man who was threatening suicide yet who "posed minimal risk to officers and may not have understood officers' commands."

"Supervisors throughout the chain of command endorse questionable and sometimes unlawful conduct by officers," Vanita Gupta, the Justice Department's top civil rights prosecutor, said in December.

The findings of the investigation were released just two weeks after Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old African-American boy, was fatally shot by a Cleveland police officer for carrying a toy pistol, fueling a nationwide wave of popular outrage over police killings.

The announcement of the settlement follows protests by hundreds of people over Saturday's acquittal of Brelo for the 2012 shooting of Timothy Russell, 43, and Malissa Williams, 30. At least 13 cops fired 137 bullets into their stopped car after a high-speed chase, involving some 62 police cars traveling at speeds of up to 125 mph.

The cops claimed they heard a shot fired from the car, but no weapons were found inside the vehicle. Both victims had drug addiction problems and Williams, who was homeless, had been diagnosed with schizophrenia.

Brelo fired 49 shots, including 15 rounds after he jumped on the hood of the car and unloaded the rest of his bullets at point-blank range. A medical examiner determined that Russell, the driver, had 23 gunshot wounds, and Williams, his passenger, had been shot 24 times.

Judge John O'Donnell acquitted Brelo of two counts of voluntary manslaughter, on the basis of the pseudo-legal argument that it was impossible to prove that the fatal

bullets came from his gun.

Protests over the ruling were met with mass arrests by cops clad in riot gear and backed up by helicopters. Seventy-one people were arrested; those with misdemeanor charges were arraigned Monday, while those accused of felonies are scheduled to be arraigned Tuesday.

Outside the municipal courthouse, Richard Grayson, a 24-year-old city resident, told the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* that police had “unlawfully arrested us.” He added, “Our generation is here to protect our rights, protect those who are criminalized, poor and everyone else who needs help.” Civil rights attorneys said that police had conducted illegal and indiscriminate arrests, sweeping up onlookers and news reporters, and had held defendants in jail for excessive durations.

The leak of the settlement agreement to the *Times* is part of a pattern of carefully timed actions by the Obama administration aimed at creating the illusion of accountability while sanctioning the exoneration of killer cops. The Cleveland probe is one of several federal investigations, including in Baltimore, Ferguson, Missouri and other cities, which have been conducted by the White House to assuage public outrage over the wave of police murders.

In each case, police departments have agreed to a series of token measures, including “independent monitors,” the hiring of more minority cops and more sensitivity training, while letting officers and officials responsible for carrying out flagrant crimes go scot-free.

In fact, the ongoing wave of police violence has been facilitated by the Obama administration, which has no response to chronic unemployment, poverty, and the economic polarization in cities like Cleveland besides bringing the methods employed by the US military overseas to bear against workers and young people in the US.



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