# Justice Department report on Chicago police an exercise in damage control

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A report released Friday by the US Justice Department details systematic police brutality and unconstitutional practices by the Chicago Police Department (CPD).

While the 161-page report outlines a broad array of horrific practices and crimes committed by the police force, it is an exercise in political damage control and cover-up. Not a single high-level political figure is held to account or charged for crimes by the investigation.

The city of Chicago has been controlled by the Democratic Party for decades with a long history of police violence and torture. The findings of the report, following a 13-month investigation, were announced at a press conference last week with US Attorney General Loretta Lynch alongside Chicago's Democratic mayor, Rahm Emanuel.

The Justice Department began its investigation of the CPD in December 2015 after the city released a video of a police officer shooting Laquan McDonald 16 times, which triggered widespread unrest and created a political crisis for the Democratic Party. The release of the video of McDonald's murder was stonewalled by the Emanuel administration for over a year until a court order forced its release, following a Freedom of Information Act request by an independent journalist.

The report's investigation spans a period from January 2011 to April 2016. It concludes that the CPD engaged in a series of "pattern or practices" that violate the US Constitution. The practices detailed in the report—following similar reports about cities such as Baltimore, Cleveland, Ferguson and New Orleans—are an indictment of the crimes of American capitalism and the state of class relations in the United States.

Some of the CPD's most egregious and brutal practices described in the report include: deadly and unreasonable use of force; systematic deficiencies and accountability failures; patterns of unlawful conduct; dangerous foot chases that resulted in officers shooting at someone who posed no immediate threat; deadly use of Tasers; deadly force against children; highly militarized police tactical units that terrorize neighborhoods; the manufacturing of false evidence; and witness intimidation.

The report also found that "officers shoot at vehicles without justification", "exhibit poor discipline when discharging their weapons," and engage in violent tactics "that endanger themselves and public safety." Frequently, such tactics are used against people with severe mental illnesses.

Working class youth frequently view the CPD as an "occupying force", according to the report. One youth revealed to the investigators that his neighborhood was an "open-air prison", constantly terrorized by the police. Another resident stated that the police operated as marauding gangs: "They patrol our streets like they are the dog catchers and we are the dogs."

The report notes that city has a systematic policy and practice of impeding investigations. The police accountability institutions are frequently complicit in the whitewashing of crimes committed by police forces. In the five years preceding the Justice Department investigation, the report found that the city of Chicago received over 30,000 complaints of police misconduct. Fewer than 2 percent were sustained, and 98 percent of complaints resulted in no disciplinary actions.

The CPD's so-called accountability bodies and independent review institutions include the widely-discredited Independent Police Review Authority (IPRA), the Bureau of Internal Affairs (BIA), the Chicago Police Board and the Inspector General. This year, IPRA is slated to be replaced by another oversight organization called the Civilian Office of Police Accountability (COPA), which the report hints will largely be toothless.

According to the report, the CPD's investigatory bodies do not investigate the majority of cases that it is required to investigate by law. When investigations do occur, the

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"questioning of officers is often cursory and aimed at eliciting favorable statements justifying the officer's actions rather than seeking truth." Moreover, while IPRA handles less than 30 percent of complaints, more than 70 percent of misconduct cases are handled via the BIA, and currently very little is published publicly about these cases.

Additionally, the report noted that it found "many circumstances in which officers' accounts of force incidents were later discredited, in whole or part, by video evidence." Moreover, given that there is no video evidence in the vast majority of cases, the report concludes that "the pattern of unreasonable force is likely even more widespread than we were able to discern through our investigation."

Finally, despite the report painting a picture of systematic police abuse, brutality and murder, it concludes with a series of palliatives and "reforms" that include new mechanisms of police accountability. These include the use of body cameras, new training measures and proposals for "community-oriented policing." What these really amount to are methods of increased surveillance by the police of working class neighborhoods through the creation of informants.

None of the proposals will address any of the underlying issues of police brutality, let alone the spike in violence in the poorest neighborhoods in Chicago. The proposals and "reforms" are largely couched in law-and-order terms, calling for greater police forces and funding for law enforcement, while the underlying social safety nets for working class youth and neighborhoods have been destroyed.

The real political purpose of the report was underscored by the presence of the Obama administration's DOJ officials alongside Emanuel at the press conference. Emanuel, a former official in the Obama administration, has presided over a regime of police violence and terror in Chicago. Despite being implicated in the cover-up of the McDonald murder, no charges have been brought against him.

Both Lynch and Emanuel made perfunctory remarks about the contents of the report at the press conference. Emanuel told the press that the issuing of the report was "sobering" and a "moment of truth." He suggested that his administration and the CPD had made "meaningful reforms" since the beginning of the DOJ investigation.

Far from ending any of brutal practices outlined in the report, the CPD has continued to kill people with impunity in the last year. The city of Chicago has also kept open the secretive police detention center in Homan Square, where multiple people have alleged torture, sexual assault and police violence. Notably, the DOJ report makes no mention of the practices at Homan Square.

Additionally, based on the findings of the report, the Justice Department and Emanuel also agreed to negotiate a consent decree—a court-ordered settlement—over the next few months that would entail federal monitoring and oversight of the implementation of so-called "reforms" to the CPD and its practices. In reality, such court-enforced "consent decrees" have been utilized in cities across the country and have failed to change the practices of police violence in various departments.

Moreover, it is far from clear how the incoming Trump administration will handle such a negotiation. Trump's nominee for Attorney General, Senator Jeff Sessions, has expressed his vocal opposition to such "consent decrees" and any nominal oversight of police departments. Trump has previously called for draconian policies in response to the spate of violence in Chicago, a symptom of rampant poverty and social breakdown. Emanuel, for his part, has said he hopes to work with Trump.

In what has become a routinized affair, a pattern of cover-up emerges with the opening of every Justice Department investigation. Systematic police violence provokes mass public outrage and protests. The capitalist political establishment, including Democrats and Republicans, do everything they can to suppress social discontent. Federal intervention provides a political cover for the violence unleashed by the state against the poorest and most vulnerable sections of society. In the end, no high-ranking officials are charged with crimes, and nothing is changed.

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