

Trump orders resumption of military supplies to local police

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President Trump signed an executive order Monday morning reinstituting a federal program to supply military-grade weaponry and equipment to state and local police forces. The program had been suspended since May 2015 under an executive order signed by Barack Obama that Trump has now rescinded.

The Obama administration was compelled to restrict, at least temporarily, the distribution of “surplus” military equipment after widespread public outrage following the deployment of armored vehicles and other military weaponry in Ferguson, Missouri, after mass protests that followed the August 2014 police murder of 18-year-old Michael Brown Jr.

When thousands took to the streets in anger over the police killing of the unarmed youth, Missouri Governor Jay Nixon, a Democrat, mobilized the National Guard, backing the local authorities, who employed armored cars, armed helicopters and police equipped with assault rifles pointed at demonstrators.

Trump signed the executive order without ceremony, leaving it to Attorney General Jeff Sessions to announce the policy change formally in an address to the convention of the Fraternal Order of Police held in Nashville, Tennessee.

“I am here to announce that President Trump is issuing an executive order that will make it easier to protect yourselves and your communities,” Sessions declared, to loud applause from the assembled police. “He is rescinding restrictions from the prior administration that limited your agencies’ ability to get equipment through federal programs...”

The program to supply military gear to local police, known as the 1033 program, after the section in the National Defense Authorization Act which first established it in 1990, allows the Pentagon to transfer equipment ranging from body armor and bullets to

aircraft, armored cars and tanks, at no cost to the local or state government.

Obama’s executive order did not halt the entire program, but restricted distribution of the most flagrant offensive weapons, including grenade launchers, armored cars and armored helicopters. Last year there was a limited recall of equipment that had been placed on a “prohibited” list, including armored cars, aircraft and explosives.

Sessions boasted that the latest executive order was only one part of a wide range of measures taken by the Trump administration to boost local police, including the reinstatement of civil asset forfeiture, which allows local police to confiscate cash and property from people based only on suspicion of crimes, without a warrant or court hearing.

Local police officials interviewed by the press in Nashville said their departments had become increasingly dependent on the free hand-me-down equipment from the Pentagon, under conditions of mounting budgetary pressures on state and local government.

The program was created under the first Bush administration, initially limited to drug enforcement units, but in 1997, under the administration of Democrat Bill Clinton, it was expanded to include all local law enforcement units. More than \$5.4 billion has been transferred to local police, a huge subsidy from the Pentagon for building up a police-state apparatus in America.

A White House background paper rejected claims that military-style equipment made the police look like “an occupying force,” saying that the decision “sends the message that we care more about public safety than about how a piece of equipment looks, especially when that equipment has been shown to reduce crime, reduce

complaints against and assaults on police, and makes officers more effective.”

The document characterized the equipment as “entirely defensive in nature,” although it includes helicopters, armored cars, battering rams, explosives and .50 caliber machine guns, as well as assault rifles.

The White House cited mass casualty shootings in San Bernardino, California and Orlando, Florida, as well as the current flood rescue operations related to Hurricane Harvey, as instances in which such equipment had been put to use. There was no mention of the far more frequent use of such materiel in protests over police violence, or its likely future use in the event of more widespread civil disorder provoked by the economic and social crisis of American capitalism.

Trump’s action seemed deliberately timed to mark the third anniversary of the police violence in Ferguson—Michael Brown was shot to death on August 9, 2014, and his funeral, attended by thousands, took place on August 25, 2014.

The policeman who shot the 18-year-old to death, Darren Wilson, was never tried for the killing, after a grand jury refused to bring charges against him, in a rigged proceeding stage-managed by St. Louis County prosecutor Robert P. McCulloch, a Democrat.

Both Trump and Sessions have been vehement defenders of killer cops, opposing all efforts to hold police accountable for killing more than 1,000 Americans every year, nearly all of them poor and working class, black, white, Hispanic and immigrant.

Trump’s executive order came barely 48 hours after his issuance of a full pardon to Joe Arpaio, the former sheriff of Maricopa County, Arizona (Phoenix), who was convicted of contempt of court for defying injunctions against racial profiling in the arrest and detention of Hispanics under “suspicion” of being undocumented immigrants.



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