

Video of Chelsea Manning “wellness check” highlights threat posed by police to mentally ill in US

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6 June 2018

Security camera video obtained and published by the *Intercept* shows that four Montgomery County police officers broke into whistleblower Chelsea Manning’s apartment in Bethesda, Maryland last month with guns drawn.

Prepared as if responding to a high-stakes hostage crisis or a barricaded armed individual, the four officers were performing a routine procedure known as a “wellness check,” carried out when police receive a tip indicating someone may be experiencing a mental health crisis and is at risk of harming themselves or others.

On May 27, Manning posted a number of since-deleted tweets which indicated to friends and followers that she was at risk of harming herself. Receiving a number of calls apparently warranting the entry into her home, a Montgomery County officer is seen using a master key to open the door and allow entry to four officers, three with hand guns drawn and one with a Taser.

Manning was fortunately absent from her home that day. The officers, armed and ready to aid and abet a suicide-by-cop, posed a serious threat of murdering in cold blood the former political prisoner and one-time Army intelligence analyst who heroically leaked information of US war crimes to the public via WikiLeaks.

In a comment given to the *Intercept*, Manning said of the video, “This is what a police state looks like. Guns drawn during a ‘wellness’ check.”

In a stroke of luck, Manning avoided execution at the hands of the police. However, thousands more are not nearly so fortunate and are slaughtered in the streets, in their homes, in their neighborhoods, with the pursuit of

justice endlessly stonewalled for those who survive and the families of victims.

According to an American Civil Liberties Union report issued by the organization’s Disability Counsel Susan Mizner, police officers acting in their official capacity have shot and killed 64 people with mental health disabilities so far in 2018. The *Washington Post*, which maintains a database of police killings having taken place from 2015 onwards, reports that of the 987 people shot and killed by police in 2017, approximately one quarter were suffering from a mental illness at the time. A similar proportion of the victims of police killings in 2016 and 2015 were suffering from a mental illness.

Research from the National Institute of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration estimates that 44.7 million American adults suffer from mental illness. Of this segment the population, however, only 41 percent receive any sort of treatment, among African Americans and Hispanics, this figure is only about 13.5 percent.

With a mental illness incidence occurring in one in five among the population but one in four among police killing victims, those suffering from mental illness are overrepresented in police shooting victim tallies.

Of course, these figures do not include the many surviving shooting victims such as University of Chicago student Charles Thomas, attacked by one of the largest private security forces in the country, the University of Chicago Police Department. Though the UCPD is one of the most egregious violators of civil liberties for mentally ill people and notorious on the South Side of Chicago for its racist policing practices, the phenomenon of police violence plagues working

class communities across United States regardless of race or ethnicity.

The response of organizations like the Fraternal Order of Police and other police unions to the routine murder of individuals suffering from mental illness could only be described as stubborn, petulant, and reactionary. In a 2016 joint statement by the FOP and International Association of Chiefs of Police, the IACP, they “reject[ed] any call to require law enforcement to. .. establish use-of-force guidelines that exceed the. .. standard set forth by the set forth by the U.S. Supreme Court nearly 30 years ago.” The incredibly reactionary stance of the police unions to maintain practices that have resulted in the needless deaths of thousands over many years reveals not only their bloodlust but their role in ruthlessly enforcing the interests of the ruling class.

In Manning’s case, the reaction of the police was no less ruthless in defending the armed response. When reached out to for comment, Montgomery County police Captain Paul Stark first alleged that the *Intercept* had been provided “a video that is inaccurate.”

Backtracking, Stark said that the officers, “once inside the residence. .. realized that the residence did not match the photo that was posted on Twitter.” He also said that the decision to enter with guns drawn “depends on the officer” and did not indicate the existence of any specific policies detailing welfare check procedures, though he did add that the police department does have a special crisis intervention unit.

While Manning’s potentially tragic experience is reflective of the dangers posed to millions of mentally ill Americans, her status as an enemy of the state suggests parallels to the 1969 murder of the Black Panther Party organizer Fred Hampton, assassinated in cold blood by a team of police officers assembled by the Cook County State’s Attorney.

While not apparently as deliberate in planning, there is no doubt that Manning is under constant surveillance from the state and that the American ruling class seeks to rid themselves of her and many others like her, including former NSA contractor Edward Snowden, living in exile in Russia, and WikiLeaks founder and publisher Julian Assange, currently being held incommunicado in the Ecuadorian embassy in London for publishing information leaked by Manning and others.



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