

# Going postal: Our heavily-armed government handlers

By Stephen Z. Nemo  
August 16, 2014

**WASHINGTON**, August 16, 2014 — The images of the riots in Ferguson, Missouri, might be mistaken for images of a violent Middle East demonstration. The outrage over the shooting death of an unarmed African-American man, Michael Brown, was met by a police force that resembled our fighting men overseas. They bore military protective gear, military weapons, and armored vehicles.

“There is a legitimate role for the police to keep the peace,” said Tea Party Senator Rand Paul, “but there should be a difference between a police response and a military response,” he wrote in an op-ed for *Time* magazine.

A few examples illustrate the point:

In 1999, the Hallendale, Florida, SWAT team burst into the home of Edwin and Catherine Bernhardt in an early morning raid, confronted the couple at gunpoint, handcuffed and dragged them to the police station. Hallendale police later realized they raided the wrong house.

“They [SWAT] made a mistake,” said Hallandale City Attorney Richard Kane. “There’s no one to blame for a mistake. The way these people were treated has to be judged in the context of war.”

Optometrist Salvatore Culosi was a betting man. As he exited his bookie’s home back in 2006, his pockets filled with cash from a winning football bet, a bullet pierced his left side. “Dude, what are you doing,” he asked a Fairfax County, Virginia, SWAT team member. Culosi cashed in his chips soon thereafter.

“I feel for the family of the victim in this case,” said Fairfax Commonwealth Attorney Robert Horan to the press. “You have to. But I also feel for the police officer. This is a good police officer. Fine record, almost 17 years.” Horan added that “in the course of bringing his weapon up, it discharged. He [the officer] has no real explanation how.”

In 2011, Jose Guerena, a U.S. Marine veteran who served two tours in Iraq, was suddenly awakened from a sound sleep by his wife. While looking out their 4-year-old son's bedroom window, Vanessa Guerena "saw a man pointing at her with a gun," Reyna Ortiz, a relative, told *ABC News*.

Guerena hid his wife and son in a closet, grabbed his rifle and waited for the home invaders to break through his front doorway. He was understandably nervous. Two family members were killed in a home invasion the previous year. Whether it was his Marine training or simply his sense of fair play, he did not want to shoot first. Tucson SWAT members "fired 71 times and hit Guerena 60 times," said *ABC News*.

"We were so worried when he was over there [Iraq] fighting terrorism," said a Guerena family member, "but he gets shot in his own home. The government killed one of their own."

The Libertarian Cato Institute's Radley Balko says, "These increasingly frequent raids, 40,000 per year by one estimate, are needlessly subjecting nonviolent drug offenders, bystanders, and wrongly targeted civilians to the terror of having their homes invaded while they're sleeping, usually by teams of heavily armed paramilitary units dressed not as police officers but as soldiers."

Earlier this month, Redwood City was the proud recipient of a military MRAP (Mine Resistant Ambush Protected vehicle) worth \$750,000. "To some, the vehicle may seem excessive," said the Redwood City Police Department on its Facebook page, "however, the Department could not select the form and size of a vehicle that it ultimately was able to acquire at no cost."

According to the *San Jose Mercury News*, "Redwood City applied for the MRAP vehicle through a federal program that offers equipment deemed surplus to local police agencies at no cost ... cities across the country have been receiving the explosive-resistant vehicles used in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars."

"The militarization of our law enforcement is due to an unprecedented expansion of government power in this realm," wrote Sen. Rand Paul in his *Time* piece, "It is one thing for federal officials to work in conjunction with local authorities to reduce or solve crime. It is quite another for them to subsidize it."

The trend to militarize domestic government agencies goes beyond the police, extending to seemingly pacific arms of the federal government. In 2012, the National Weather Service announced it was seeking 46,000 rounds of ammunition on the government bidding website FedBizOpps.gov. Weather Service spokesman Chris Vaccaro attempted to clarify the issue, saying the bulk ammunition purchase was made on behalf of the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), which operates under the auspices of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. "What the NMFS is doing with the ammunition is another question," said the *Washington Post*.

The same government bidding website disclosed that the Social Security Administration (SSA) required 174,000 rounds of “.357 Sig 125 grain bonded jacketed hollow point pistol ammunition.” Hollow point rounds expand after entering the body, increasing the bullet’s lethality.

The Social Security’s Office of the Inspector General said, “These [SSA] investigators have full law enforcement authority, including executing search warrants and making arrests. Our investigators are similar to your state or local police officers.”

If that is true, it’s only a matter of time before the U.S. Postal Service delivers mail from military surplus armored vehicles. Oh, it turns out that the U.S. Postal Service is also in the market for ammunition. “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds.”

Hollow-point rounds, apparently.

Our betters tell us not to worry and to stop asking so many questions. Doing so only makes us appear paranoid and unbalanced.

Of course the Bureau of Land Management deployed its paramilitary unit to threaten a bothersome Nevada cattle rancher. And the Department of Homeland Security and Miami-Dade Southeast Regional Domestic Security Task Force used military-style helicopters to fire blank ammunition from mounted machine guns in a training exercise over Miami, Florida.

No need to worry. There is nothing here to see.

As the Fort Lauderdale *Sun Sentinel* reported, “A Miami police spokesman said the helicopters were conducting an ‘operational’ training drill. He was not allowed to comment on details of the drill.”

And what we don’t know can’t hurt us, right?