

# TASK & PURPOSE

## Cops And Veterans: The Real Problem May Be The ‘Pseudo-Militarization’ Of American Police

Jonathan Blanks

April 24, 2018

I was not aware that veterans had particular animosity or resentment for police, but I can't say it surprises me if that's true. Anecdotally, I've heard and read comments by veterans that echo those in the *T&P* piece complaining about how American police treat the public and how it differs from how soldiers treat non-combatants in war zones, particularly regarding the pointing of weapons and the use of force. Moreover, speaking as a civilian gun owner, seeing officers point rifles at peaceful protesters just to use the scope is an appalling violation of the most basic tenets of gun safety.

These comments have led me to wonder whether we've misnamed the problem as “police over-militarization” rather than “police pseudo-militarization.” Everything I've read about rules of engagement and how military personnel engage non-combatants is far more restrained and respectful than what American police often do. Thus, calling American police behavior “militarization” assigns an unwarranted professionalism and respect to what the American police are doing and simultaneously misrepresents how our servicemen and women treat others abroad.

For more on this I recommend a recently released a short policy paper by R Street's Arthur Rizer, a veteran and former police officer, suggesting we arm police more like Batman and less like GI Joe. I also recommend a longer economic paper published in 2017 that shows departments that acquire equipment through the 1033 program have more uses of force and, specifically, more fatal officer-involved shootings.

*Jonathan Blanks is a Research Associate in Cato's Project on Criminal Justice and a Writer in Residence at Harvard University's Fair Punishment Project. His research is focused on law enforcement practices, overcriminalization, and civil liberties.*