



## Local Law Enforcement More Dangerous, Thanks To Trickle Down Of Military Equipment, Militarized Mindset

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For a mere \$2,500, the Walton County, Fla., Sheriff's Department purchased a military surplus mine-resistant, ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicle — that cost more than \$500,000 to build — to help with its law enforcement activities. This is the same vehicle that the U.S. military deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq to use against insurgents.

The Florida county is just one in a long line of communities using Federal programs designed to militarize local law enforcement by providing them with military equipment and military training. Studies estimate as many as 500 communities have acquired MRAPs. The result has helped to turn local police and sheriff's departments — originally tasked to protect and serve their public — into violent, shoot-first quasi-military organizations terrorizing and abusing the public. This is not hyperbole, as we show regularly in our Power Of The State section.

Walton County is so idyllic and peaceful that residents feel no need to lock their doors, and its peaceful nature is so over-the-top unusual that one of its communities was chosen as the location for filming "The Truman Show." Yet Sheriff Mike Adkinson said the MRAP was needed as an "insurance policy" to keep deputies safe in dangerous situations.

The problem with police departments acquiring new military "toys" comes in the fact that, when toys are acquired, they are wont to be used. And therein lies the rub. Police use flimsy evidence to suggest "threats" exist, and the military tactics escalate encounters and create more violence.

The American Civil Liberties Union recently completed a study of 800 deployments by heavily armed Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams from 20 law enforcement agencies over the period 2011-2012. It found that more than three-fourths of the deployments were executed — often using MRAPs — to search a person's home, and more than 60 percent of the time the searches were for drugs. But in at least 36 percent of the SWAT raids studied, no drugs were found. And because police reports were often incomplete, the ACLU notes that the actual figure could be as high as 65 percent.

SWAT teams were originally created to respond to hostage, barricade or active shooter scenarios. But only 7 percent of deployments in the ACLU study were employed for SWAT teams' original intent.

Records provided the ACLU by 63 responding law enforcement agencies showed they received “a total of 15,054 items of battle uniforms or personal protective equipment” in 2011-2012.

In addition to battle uniforms and gear, officers are increasingly trained in military tactics and they increasingly come from the ranks of military units previously deployed in war zones. Their training “encourages them to adopt a ‘warrior’ mentality and think of people they are supposed to serve as enemies.” And the equipment they use includes battering rams, flashbang grenades and the aforementioned MRAPS or other armored personnel carriers.

It’s not unusual for the raids to be carried out late at night to increase the confusion among the occupants who are startled from sleep. But it also increases the likelihood innocents are in the house, which increases the danger to them.

To put into perspective just how twisted local law enforcement agencies have become, consider this quote from Sgt. Dan Downing of the Morgan County, Indiana Sheriff’s Department. Regarding his agency’s acquisition of an MRAP, he said: “The weaponry is totally different now that it was in the beginning of my career, plus, you have a lot of people who are coming out of the military that have the ability and knowledge to build IEDs and to defeat law enforcement techniques.”

This straw man argument is increasingly being promoted by the Federal government in propaganda pieces distributed by the Department of Homeland Security and the FBI, as I’ve reported before. But to hear it come from a member of a local law enforcement agency, the ranks of which contain many “people who are coming out of the military,” is mind-boggling. Plus, I have yet to see an instance reported of a U.S. veteran employing IEDs against local police.

In fact, attacks on police are down. Firearm-related deaths of police officers reached a 126-year low in 2013, according to a report by the national Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. It’s the second year in a row for a decline, and the number of firearm-related police fatalities has dropped each decade since the 1970s.

The creation of the DHS after 9/11 has contributed to the militarization of local police departments by dispersing grant money and eliciting their assistance in so-called anti-terrorism enforcement. These grants have enabled local departments to stockpile specialized equipment in order to facilitate “readiness” for a terror event. It also increased the contact between a quasi-military agency — the DHS — and local departments.

Violent SWAT raids have resulted in death and injury of innocents — including women and children — often in homes targeted by mistake. Even pets aren’t safe around SWAT teams and patrol officers.

A 2012 report by the CATO Institute found that “40,000 [SWAT raids] 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. These raids bring unnecessary violence and provocation to nonviolent drug offenders, many of whom were guilty

of only misdemeanors. The raids terrorize innocents when police mistakenly target the wrong residence. And they have resulted in dozens of needless deaths and injuries, not only of drug offenders, but also of police officers, children, bystanders, and innocent suspects.”

The DHS long ago jumped the shark in regard to considering all Americans as potential terrorists, and this mindset has increasingly filtered into local police departments through their ongoing contacts and training with DHS. But as we’ve told you before, most, if not all, U.S. terror plots are actually instigated and planned by the FBI.

The militarized mindset is not just reserved to SWAT officers, but has trickled down into all reaches of law enforcement, as evidenced by the increased prevalence of violent encounters between police and peaceful citizens.

Cops have come to think of themselves as gods above the law whose commands are to be obeyed immediately and without question. Any hesitation often leads to the “suspect” being left bleeding and broken or quivering from electricity introduced by a Taser. It doesn’t matter if the person was unable to understand the command because of a language barrier or if the person was unable to comply due to disability or defect. Officers expect immediate and complete compliance with no questions asked.

They are increasingly shooting dogs for barking, shocking with Tasers (see here and here) and pepper spraying children in schools, and shooting wheelchair-bound men in the streets. They apparently feel they operate above the law.

And their militarized appearance, backed by their militarized vehicles and overbearingly intimidating demeanor and the increasingly violent interactions they are having with the public, is creating a sense of fear. And that fear is justified, given that public safety is no longer the number one goal of local police.

How do I know that? By the actions and words of police departments acquiring the weaponry and using the tactics.

“I know that if somebody was in harm’s way, I wouldn’t let public opinion decide the safety of my deputy,” Adkinson said. “Safety is my number one priority.”

“At the end of the day, it gives the guys the ability to go home safely,” said Downing, “So, no matter what the price tag is on it, as long as they get to go home, that’s all that really matters.”

Note that it’s the safety of law enforcement that is the “number one priority” and “that’s all that really matters.”