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Almost One-Third of All Killing By Police Aren't Reported – and Now, The Feds Are Stepping In to Make Sure They Are

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It is well known by that civilian police officers in the U.S. kill people in the line of duty far more than they do in other nations. This fact has come into sharp focus over the past few years with news about police killings being reported in the media nearly every week.

What is far less known is that fully 28% aren't documented by official sources. That is about to change.

Going forward, new policies established by the FBI and the Bureau of Justice will require municipal police departments to file a report on all "arrest-related deaths," including full documentation of the surrounding circumstances.

This new policy, which was influenced by a website known as "The Counted" (maintained by *The Guardian*, a UK-based news source), comes in response to growing awareness of the issue and ongoing civil unrest that has resulted from news of these killings. Currently, officials at the Justice Department are taking comments on the proposal until October 3rd. The program would bring greater transparency and accountability regarding the use of excessive force by law enforcement officers.

According to the Department of Justice,

"Accurate and comprehensive accounting of deaths that occur during the process of arrest is critical for law enforcement agencies to demonstrate responsiveness to the citizens and communities they serve."

While we at *The Ring of Fire* wholeheartedly agree with that statement and support the new policy, it begs the question of why federal agencies haven't been doing this all along.

Here is a grim statistic that should nonetheless come as no surprise to our readers: **U.S. law enforcement officers kill people in the line of duty at a rate that is on the average 70% greater than that of other industrialized nations.** Of these victims, a disproportionate number are people of color, particularly African-Americans. At the same time, the rate of deaths in the line of duty among police officers is at its lowest point in history. Despite this, police officers are authorized to use deadly force, even if they simply *perceive* a life-threatening situation. Furthermore, police officers are rarely held accountable for those they kill – legally or otherwise.

One of the problems is that the system is rigged in favor of the officer when a shooting is involved. Under U.S. laws, police officers are given a great deal of leeway to use force in virtually any situation. And even if an officer is charged with misconduct and the case goes to trial, it doesn't result in a conviction very often. According to the Cato Institute's National Police Misconduct Reporting Project, only one-third of officers charged with misconduct are convicted – and of those, only 36% ever do any prison time. In contrast, approximate 50% of ordinary citizens who are tried for crimes wind up convicted and serving sentences.

Why is this? According to civil rights attorney David Rudovsky, reasonable doubt carries a great deal of weight in such cases. He says, "A prosecutor needs a very strong case before a jury will say that somebody we generally trust to protect us has so seriously crossed the line as to be subject to a conviction." It doesn't help that many investigations into such accusations begin internally, within the police departments themselves.

Small wonder that increasingly, the American public believes that having a uniform and a badge is tantamount to a license to kill.

There are other issues that come into play as well. In many ways, the federal government itself bears some responsibility; the misguided and farcical so-called "War on Drugs" for the past generation has led to the increased militarization of civilian police forces, giving them greater access to military-style weapons and tactics. There's also a dirty little secret among police departments that started coming out only last year – and that's the use of anabolic steroids among officers. That problem has been around for almost a generation. Steroid use causes, among other things, paranoia, feelings of invincibility, and aggressive behavior – bad states of mind to be in when one is in a stressful job and situation to begin with.

It is worth mentioning that in most other countries, police officers receive intensive training in methods and applications of non-lethal force, using devices such as pepper spray and billy clubs. Furthermore, police training in other industrialized nations goes on for longer periods of time and involves extensive education in how to de-escalate conflict. For example, German policemen and women must undergo training for more than two years before they are authorized to don a badge. In contrast, U.S. police cadets train for an average of less than five months – less time than it takes to become a cosmetologist.

In Germany last year, the number of individuals killed by police officers was 2. Meanwhile in the U.S., police killed nearly a thousand citizens. In both cases of German-sanctioned police murder, the suspect had drawn a knife and had actively attacked the officers.

The new U.S. federal policy will require police departments to report on every person killed by an officer – including details about the circumstances surrounding the victim's death. Police departments that fail to meet these requirement will face loss of federal funding. Hopefully, this new, more stringent reporting mandate will start to bring much-needed and long-overdue transparency and accountability to an issue that has become far too serious to sweep under the rug any longer.