



Ind. campus police acquire military surplus gear

Michael Auslen and Brian Eason

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Textbooks, football and Greek life.

Keggers, marching bands and all-nighters.

A militarized campus police department armed with M14 rifles and full riot gear?

Increasingly, at Indiana college campuses, you'll find all of the above.

Even as a national debate about militarized police forces rages in the aftermath of the Ferguson, Missouri, police shooting, at least six Indiana universities already had armed their officers with military leftovers, according to an Indianapolis Star review of public records.

It's a trend that has supporters and detractors, some arguing that military-grade rifles and protective equipment will keep students and faculty safe in the case of a campus shooting, others concerned that a college is no place for military-style weaponry.

Community and campus police in Indiana have obtained more than 4,400 items since 2010 through a program that distributes surplus military supplies, according to The Star's review. The agencies pay only the cost of delivery.

University police have obtained body armor, military vehicles and M14 and M16 rifles — high-powered weapons that remind Purdue University Calumet Police Chief Anthony Martin of ones he used in the Vietnam War.

“Particularly after we have just read about Ferguson, I have been re-evaluating the need of an M14,” Martin said. “It’s a heavy weapon.”

Faculty leaders at two universities said they were unaware that their institutions had acquired such weaponry but differed over whether it was cause for concern.

Feng-Song Wang, chairman of the Purdue University Calumet Faculty Senate, said he was shocked to learn that campus police at a regional college of 9,400 students would have military-grade gear and requested a full inventory of the equipment acquired.

“Clearly, I will talk to the vice chancellor about this issue,” Wang said.

Herb Terry, former president of the Indiana University Faculty Council, said he trusts the police on his campus to use discretion with the equipment.

“I think you need to remember something about all of our campus police forces,” Terry said. “They all, I believe, have the full police powers of any police officer in the state of Indiana. They go through the state academy, that sort of thing.”

And, he said, when the situation dictates, as with Thursday’s incident at IU-Southeast in New Albany, where a student carrying an umbrella was mistaken for a gunman, campus police work with local law enforcement to respond.

“What I would hope is that the police forces in those areas talk to each other and are well coordinated, and yeah, that might mean that if there is a need for any of this special kind of equipment, that they have it,” he said. “And my God, if they have it, I hope that they are trained in how to use it.”

The extent to which the equipment has been used varies by campus. At Vincennes University, police Chief James Jones said his officers “haven’t had to use” their M16s but have been trained with them. At IU, they’ve been used occasionally for certain felony stops and to respond to reports of armed people or shots fired on and around campus.

Blurring lines

The move toward what he calls a more militarized police force has been a long road, said Tim Lynch, director of the Project on Criminal Justice at the libertarian Cato Institute.

Despite years of buildup, the practice only recently erupted in controversy. In the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson, police used weapons and armored vehicles to quell protests after a police officer fatally shot 18-year-old Michael Brown.

Nearly two weeks of protests followed and developed into a nationwide debate about the kinds of equipment to which police departments have access, the so-called militarization of America’s police forces. [Last week in Washington, lawmakers held hearings on the subject, and Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., called for limits to programs that supply police with military equipment.](#)

Lynch argues that the proliferation of SWAT teams using military-grade equipment has blurred the lines between police and the military, two distinct groups that historically have pursued different missions.

“The military is trained to fight the enemy and wreak havoc on them,” Lynch said. “With the civilian police, they are dealing with people who have constitutional rights, and we want them to avoid the use of force if possible and to use the minimum required to bring a suspect into a court of law.”

On college campuses, police roles are even more narrowly defined: Police are there to protect students and faculty, said Martin, the Purdue Calumet police chief.

That’s exactly why top brass at some Indiana colleges say they need surplus military materials.

“Police departments are typically not warriors; they’re typically guardians of a community,” said Jerry Minger, who oversees seven campus police departments at Indiana University. “How do you protect the community if you don’t have the appropriate equipment to do so?”

A growing arsenal

At IU Bloomington, the equipment includes six M16 rifles, according to records obtained from the Indiana Department of Administration. Paying only the cost of delivery offers departments big savings for weapons that originally cost the government \$120 to \$500.

Minger said the weapons have been modified so they’re not fully automatic, which brings them more in line with the firearms police departments buy commercially.

Similar rifles have been obtained for Purdue University, Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, Purdue Calumet, Valparaiso University and Vincennes University. Valparaiso has fewer than 5,000 students and two M14 rifles.

According to the Indiana Department of Administration, Purdue police at the West Lafayette campus had 25 M16A1 rifles in inventory as of Jan. 24. Officials with Purdue police did not return calls for comment.

The overwhelming impetus for obtaining high-powered weapons such as the M14 and M16 is the rise of school shootings.

Purdue police responded to an on-campus shooting in January, although the victim was targeted, distinguishing the slaying from scenarios at Columbine High School in Colorado and Virginia Tech. Minger said the prevalence of shootings has changed how campus police prepare.

“Perpetrators were using rifles and high-velocity weapons,” he said. “If the criminals have that type of weapon, we need something to combat that with.”

Not everything that Indiana campus police have obtained from military surplus is weaponry. IU first used the program for helmets and bulletproof vests, Minger said.

The Vincennes University Police Department has boats, a Ford F-10 pickup truck and a “deuce and a half,” a 2½-ton military cargo truck, said Jones, the police chief. Officers use the vehicle as a mobile command center and the boats to patrol the Wabash River, which runs along the campus.

The equipment — vehicles, protective wear and weapons — is necessary, argue Jones and his counterparts across the state. If they couldn’t get them from surplus military stock, they would have to find other options.

‘The tone is right’

Despite the controversy and hearings in Congress, Jones said the program is justifiable because it allows his department to be prepared in case something happens.

IU’s Minger said he understands why the M16 rifles and other equipment cause concern.

“We really have evaluated it carefully and didn’t try to have more equipment than we really needed or was really rational to have.”

Terry, the former faculty council president at IU, suggested the thing to monitor might be the people wielding the weapons, not the weapons.

“Frankly, I think in many instances, the tone of these forces is set by their campus leadership,” Terry said. “My impression of the IUPD forces is that the tone is right — it isn’t over-militarized.”

CAMPUS ARSENALS

Over the past four years, at least five Indiana universities purchased leftover military equipment through a Department of Defense program. Here’s what they acquired:

Indiana University Bloomington: Six M16 rifles

Indiana University Purdue University Fort Wayne: Six M16A1 rifles, three M16 rifles, 12 .45-caliber pistols

Purdue University (West Lafayette): 25 M16A1 rifles

Purdue University Calumet: Three M-14 rifles.

Valparaiso University: Two M14 rifles.

Vincennes University: Nine M16 rifles.

