



Police Departments Keep Losing Their Military Humvees and Assault Rifles

By Arit John
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One thing worse than a police department misusing a military Humvee is a joyrider misusing a military Humvee he stole from the cops. Police in Palestine, Arkansas, a small town of 700, found that out the hard way when a resident stole the vehicle, went for a spin and crashed into a tree. Now the force uses it as spare parts for its other Humvee.

Palestine Police Chief Stanley Barnes told Yahoo News “it never crossed my mind” that someone might try to steal the vehicle, which is maybe why it took the force a week to realize the Humvee was missing (stolen Humvees should be reported to the Pentagon within 24 hours). This has been a particularly good year for Humvee thieves — in July, Missouri officials apprehended a man they believed stole the vehicle from the St. Francois County police to rob convenience stores.

Yahoo found that at least four police departments have had their Pentagon issued Humvees stolen in the last five years. And a recent Fusion report found that 184 state and local police departments across the country have been suspended from the Pentagon's 1033 program for losing equipment, mostly assault rifles, pistols, shotguns, and Humvees.

But suspension from the 1033 program takes more than a stolen Humvee. St. Francois County reported its missing vehicle within 24 hours and avoided suspension. Even police forces that do get suspended still get to keep the equipment they already have. Fusion found that it's only after repeated "accountability of weapons" issues that some departments have been forced to return all of their weapons.

These are the issues Congress and the White House will have to examine when they review the 1033 program later this month. As *The New York Times* reported last month, the White House will determine whether police departments have the training to use the weapons, whether the program was a good idea in the first place and whether the government is keeping a close enough eye on its inventory. Recent evidence seems to suggest it doesn't.

In addition to lost weapons, poor record keeping, corruption and fraud also play into the mismanagement of the 1033 program. Tim Lynch, the director of the Cato Institute's criminal justice program told Fusion that 1033 is "obviously very sloppy (and) we don't know where these weapons are going, whether they are really lost, or whether there is corruption involved." In an interview with The Wire earlier this month Lynch called for the program to be shut down, adding that police departments are more reasonable when they have to spend their own money. "They have to decide whether they need a new police car or a new officer or an armored vehicle from the Pentagon," Lynch said.