



## **U.S. cops need bigger guns: Critics of police 'militarization' need to wake up to the new reality of urban terrorism**

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The horrific slaughter in Paris should again remind us that closing our eyes and hoping for the best is no way to protect the people of our country.

After the tumultuous events of Ferguson — when an armored personnel carrier was rolled out — critics of police “militarization” pounced: This, they said, was proof that the American police were out of control and overequipped.

Why, they wondered, was it necessary for cops across the country to be armed with hardware typically associated with the Army: armored vehicles, night goggles and assault rifles? (Of course, eight-ton vehicles are much harder to flip over during riots than police cruisers.)

It wasn't a partisan question. Republican Sen. Rand Paul joined Democratic Sen. Claire McCaskill in outrage. The White House stepped in to order a review of programs gifting surplus military gear to local police departments. It was a moment in the sun for libertarian outfits like the Cato Institute, which has churned out reports suggesting that the nation's police, like boys with toys, harbor a sinister obsession with arming themselves to the teeth.

While it is no doubt true there are parts of the country where there are too many poorly trained and overarmed SWAT teams, some of which are being used for penny-ante drug raids and the like, the events in Paris alert us to a far larger problem. In this country, which unlike many other Western nations does not have a domestic terror-fighting agency, law enforcement in places large and small is our infantry.

They are our front-line first responders, the only ones willing and able to go head-to-head with those bent on dying while committing mass murder. In Paris, perpetrators wore suicide vests and carried AK-47s.

At present only a handful of police departments have the capacity to intimidate would-be terrorists and, if need be, wage sustained combat against them in the streets of America. This is a weakness to correct, not a condition to celebrate.

It is all but certain that, if ISIS and its affiliates can find an opening, the horrors of Paris and Beirut will find their way to New York or Portland or suburban Denver. The terrorists are certainly trying: Federal agents have been overwhelmed with cases of individuals from the U.S. going to the Middle East to fight with ISIS.

The typical U.S. police officer carries a semiautomatic pistol. While that is fine for routine duty, it's not up to the attacks that have been staged worldwide, in Paris, but also in India and elsewhere.

The NYPD has just smartly deployed a new, specially armed and trained anti-terrorism unit that, at full strength, will have 500 officers — and can respond to simultaneous attacks and hostage situations. Good. But they can't be everywhere. We have to give serious thought to having more ordinary New York City patrol officers carry more sophisticated weapons, even if only in vehicle trunks.

The absence of an attack to date does not mean that we are safe in the long run. Those who traffic in terror are patient. They carry out attacks at times and places of their choosing.

Recall that the City of Boston and a swath of its surroundings were essentially shut down after the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings. The scope of the attacks and number of attackers were not immediately apparent, and police and federal agents scrambled to scour a huge area. While fleeing, the Tsarnaev brothers executed a police officer, shooting him twice in the head and once between the eyes, according to federal prosecutors.

Those who sneer at enhanced protective measures as futile should note that the Paris attackers were kept out of the stadium due to heightened security — which likely saved many from perishing in a stampede.

Some are using the Paris attack to call for more guns in the hands of ordinary civilians, arguing that concealed weapons are the best defense against terrorism. This might in some cases help, but it has a serious downside. Those guns might also be used to commit crimes, mass shootings or acts of terror. It is unclear whether an ordinary individual armed with a handgun in Paris would have been able to stop trained assassins wielding weapons of mass destruction. It might have simply added to the chaos and casualties.

The answer is ensuring that cops — trained officers — have the means to defend the public should the worst happen.

No doubt as a nation, our first wish is for a world less dangerous. However, our next wish should be that if the time comes again, the nation is not as completely unprepared as it clearly was on

that early fall day in 2001 when so many lives were lost and so much enduring damage was inflicted on America.

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