



## **Ferguson focus turns from riots to militarized cops**

**Rand Paul: 'How did this happen? Most police officers are good cops and good people'**

By Bob Unruh  
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The violence linked to protests that turned into rioting and looting in the St. Louis suburb of Ferguson this week after the shooting death of an apparently unarmed teenager by police appears to be subsiding. At least somewhat. At least for now.

For example, crowds on Thursday held a moment of silence to remember Michael Brown.

But the controversy isn't dying away, it's just refocusing on the militarized police presence and actions.

The criticism isn't just coming from activists such as Al Sharpton, who reliably can be counted on for such comments.

The blasts are coming from personalities like Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky.

In a commentary today in Time, Paul wrote, "The images and scenes we continue to see in Ferguson resemble war more than traditional police action."

He noted Walter Olson of the Cato Institute had raised the alarm of the "rising militarization of law enforcement."

"Why armored vehicles in a Midwestern inner suburb? Why would cops wear camouflage gear against a terrain patterned by convenience stores and beauty parlors? Why are the authorities in Ferguson, Missouri, so given to quasi-martial crowd control methods (such as bans on walking on the street) and, per the reporting of Riverfront Times, the firing of tear gas at people in their own yards?" Olson wrote.

Paul continued: "Olson added, 'the dominant visual aspect of the story, however, has been the sight of overpowering police forces confronting unarmed protesters who are seen waving signs or just their hands.'

“How did this happen?” Paul asked. “Most police officers are good cops and good people. It is an unquestionably difficult job, especially in the current circumstances.”

He said the problem is with “big government,” because “Washington has incentivized the militarization of local police precincts by using federal dollars to help municipal governments build what are essentially small armies – where police departments compete to acquire military gear that goes far beyond what most of Americans think of as law enforcement.”

David Mastio and Kelsey Rupp wrote in a USA Today commentary that, “The Pentagon might not have boots on the ground in Ferguson, Missouri, where 18-year-old Michael Brown was shot by police on Saturday, but it does have wheels on the street.”

“Michelle McCaskill, media relations chief at the Defense Logistics Agency, confirms the Ferguson Police Department is part of a federal program called 1033 that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars of surplus military equipment to civilian police forces across the United States. The materials range from small items, such as pistols and automatic rifles, to heavy armored vehicles such as the MRAPs used in Afghanistan and Iraq,” Mastio and Rupp reported.

The results have been predictable, with one report of police attempting to confiscate news footage of their activities.

“A news crew, clearly no threat or impediment to the cops, films from a verge in Ferguson, Missouri. A pop and a cloud of white smoke marks the arrival of a tear gas canister at their feet, and the newscrew is forced to flee. Moments later, police pull up in an armored van and hurriedly try to break down the film equipment – until they notice that *another* crew is still filming them from across the street.”

WND reported more than a day ago about concerns that were building over police militarization.

At that time, Cheryl Chumley, author of “Police State USA: How Orwell’s Nightmare is Becoming Our Reality,” told WND, “Armored vehicles on patrol, Kevlar-wearing, camouflage-dressed officials carting high-powered rifles, tear gas wafting through the air – sounds like something right off the streets of Iraq. But it’s not. It’s actually the scene that’s playing out in Ferguson right now, with SWAT-type police taking to the residential streets for crowd-control duties.”

She questioned whether the massive response was justified.

The spark for the fight, the shooting death of Brown over last weekend, still hasn’t been fully explained. There was a confrontation with an officer. There are allegations of a fight, and police said the officer’s face was hurt. Then gunshots and Brown is dead.

“While looting has no doubt become an issue in the area, and protesters have reportedly taken on more violent tones, it has to be asked: Do police really need to dress like

battleground soldiers to get the crowds into control?” Chumley asked. “What ever happened to the old ‘serve and protect’ model and mantra of civilian policing?”

It was in a report only hours earlier that Politico revealed the arrest of two reporters – the Washington Post’s Wesley Lowery and the Huffington Post’s Ryan Reilly.

They ended up in custody when they reportedly didn’t respond quickly enough to police orders for people to leave a McDonald’s restaurant.

Martin Baron, executive editor of the Post, said Lowery briefed the newspaper on the arrest, “and there was absolutely no justification.”

“He was illegally instructed to stop taking video of officers. Then he followed officers’ instructions to leave a McDonald’s – and after contradictory instructions on how to exit, he was slammed against a soda machine and then handcuffed. That behavior was wholly unwarranted and an assault on the freedom of the press to cover the news. The physical risk to Wesley himself is obvious and outrageous,” he said.

City officials were asking for people to do their protesting during the day, but halt the violence at night.

“The city of Ferguson mourns the loss of Michael Brown’s life that occurred this past Saturday,” the city statement said. “We understand members of our community, and those nationwide, are grieving with us. We have worked diligently to provide an opportunity for our residents to both grieve and voice frustrations through prayer vigils and peaceful protests.”

According to a CBS report, hundreds have attended services in churches this week prompted by Brown’s death.

One church service featured Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, who urged calm, and another featured Sharpton, who criticized authorities for withholding the name of the officer, a move authorities said was prompted by death threats.

But the police, even militarized, aren’t to blame for everything, according to one black commentator who posted an online video in which he also told the black community to get its act together:

The rant included, “Rioting is not helping us” and “Acting a fool because we’re pissed off at the police is not helping.”

He continued, “Let’s change as black people. ... How [are] our kids supposed to grow up when we’re out here acting stupid.”

Barack Obama jumped into the local controversy, stating, “His family will never hold Michael in their arms again.”

And Rep. John Lewis of Georgia said Obama needs to clear martial law in Ferguson.

“President Obama should use the authority of his office to declare martial law,” he said. “Federalize the Missouri National Guard to protect people as they protest.”

Authorities did report having Molotov cocktails thrown and random gunshots, although there have apparently been no injuries since the first night, when there were several dozen arrests and a couple of officers hurt.

But a change is developing . USA Today reported “Several marchers stopped to shake hands with police and troopers. Some people have stopped to hug and chat with Capt. Ron Johnson of the Highway Patrol.”

“The scene stands in stark contrast [to] clashes earlier this week when officers wore riot gear,” the report said, noting the change from command by the county police department to command by the state patrol office.