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Violence, Government Violence, and Anti-Government Rhetoric

Sunday, January 9th, 2011

Thanks to the folks at the Show Me Institute, CoMoCitizens, and Keep Columbia Free for obtaining and posting this video and the information surrounding it. It's footage of another raid carried out by the Columbia, Missouri Police Department.



Like the widely-viewed video released in May, this was a drug raid. Unlike the prior video, it appears that in this case the police found strong evidence that someone in this house was dealing drugs. But I think that actually makes this video particularly important. If we're going to continue to fight the drug war, America ought to see just how literally the government is taking that war to our homes, streets, and neighborhoods. (Note the presence of children in the home.)

As with the first video, this raid isn't specific to Columbia PD. It's typical. It employs the same violent, volatile tactics used 100-150 times per day in this country to serve search warrants for drug crimes. They're the same tactics that have led government employees to terrorize, injure, and kill dozens of nonviolent drug offenders. Below is video of such a killing. Todd Blair, a meth user, was shot and killed by Utah police during a SWAT raid on his home last year. There's no evidence he was dealing. He had four dollars in his pocket when he died. When police broke into his home, he confronted them with a golf club. So they shot him in the head and chest.

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They're the same tactics that, last week, caused Framingham, Massachusetts police to shoot and kill 68-year-old Eurie Stamps, an innocent, unarmed man whose only apparent transgression was to have allowed his girlfriend's son to live with him. And they're the same tactics that led police in Georgia to shoot and kill Jonathan Ayers, a pastor whose only transgression was to have ministered to a woman the police were investigating for drugs and prostitution. Below is the map I put together for Cato, which I'm certain is not comprehensive, of other completely innocent people killed in drug raids. These are people who weren't even using, much less dealing. Click here to read their stories.



Of course the drug war is merely one of a number of government policies that result in violence against its own citizens. We're going to hear a lot of talk in the coming days about putting an end to anti-government rhetoric. I've been listening to it all morning on the Sunday talk shows. Let's get the obvious out of the way, here: Initiating violence against government officials and politicians is wrongheaded, immoral, futile, and counterproductive to any anti-government cause. As is encouraging or praising others who do. I ban anyone who engages in that kind of talk here.

But it's worth remembering that the government initiates violence against its own citizens every day in this country, citizens who pose no threat or harm to anyone else. The particular policy that leads to the sort of violence you see in these videos is supported by nearly all of the politicians and pundits decrying anti-government rhetoric on the news channels this morning. (It's also supported by Sarah Palin, many Tea Party leaders, and other figures on the right that politicians and pundits are shaming this weekend.)

I hope Rep. Giffords—and everyone wounded yesterday—makes a full recovery. It's particularly tragic that she was shot while doing exactly what we want elected officials to do—she was making herself available to the people she serves. And of course we should mourn the people senselessly murdered yesterday, government employees and otherwise: U.S. District Judge John Roll, Dorothy Murray, Dorwin Stoddard, nine-year-old Christina Green, Phyllis Scheck, and Gabe Zimmerman.

That said, I long for the day that our political and media figures get as indignant about innocent Americans killed by their own government—killed in fact, as a direct and foreseeable consequence of official government policy that nearly all of those leaders

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support—as they are about a government official who was targeted by a clearly sick and deranged young man. What happened this weekend is *not*, by any means, a reason to shunt anti-government protest, even angry anti-government protest, out of the sphere of acceptable debate. The government still engages in plenty of acts and policies—including one-sided violence against its own citizens—that are well worth our anger, protest, and condemnation.

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This entry was posted on Sunday, January 9th, 2011 at 2:10 pm by Radley Balko and is filed under General Drug War, Police Militarization. You can follow any responses to this entry through the RSS 2.0 feed. You can leave a response, or trackback from your own site.

49 Responses to “Violence, Government Violence, and Anti-Government Rhetoric”

#1 | **CyniCAI** | January 9th, 2011 at 2:35 pm

“But it’s worth remembering that the government initiates violence against its own citizens every day in this country, citizens who pose no threat or harm to anyone else. The particular policy that leads to the sort of violence you see in these videos is supported by nearly all of the politicians and pundits decrying anti-government rhetoric on the news channels this morning.”

And leopards have unchangeable spots.

The very EXISTENCE of government makes this situation necessary.

Just as dogs will continue to be shot because of their potential capacity for violence, so too will humans, until the day when humans can learn to live without violence.

I will wait, but not too long. I figure at my age I have approximately 40 years of waiting left (unless the State or nature abbreviates that) before it doesn’t matter to me anymore.

#2 | **jb** | January 9th, 2011 at 2:35 pm

You nailed it.

#3 | **Tweets that mention Violence, Government Violence, and Anti-Government Rhetoric | The Agitator -- Topsy.com** | January 9th, 2011 at 2:51 pm

[...] This post was mentioned on Twitter by radleybalko, Ben Smith and others. Ben Smith said: RT @alexmassie: Superb Radley Balko post on "violent rhetoric" vs *actual violence.* Guess which gets more attention? <http://bit.ly/enk7DI> [...]

#4 | **The Mossy Spaniard** | January 9th, 2011 at 2:55 pm

Radley, your take on yesterday’s events is the most measured assessment I’ve read yet. A far cry from some of the amoral and borderline-inhuman comments I read at Hit and Run yesterday.

#5 | **Bob** | January 9th, 2011 at 2:58 pm

So that’s a ‘justified’ killing, huh? The cops run in yelling “WREEEEE! We’re the frat boys!” (That’s what it sounded like to me at least.) see a guy holding a golf club and just fire away. He wasn’t attacking them or anything, the guy was cowering with his back to a wall, clearly scared shitless. The cop just opened up the instant he saw the golf club. That’s great threat assessment, jack ass.

Wow, this guy better be a king pin of organized crime to get that kind of treatment... Nope, just a drug user.

Some of the comments are disgusting. I could only try to read a few of them.
