

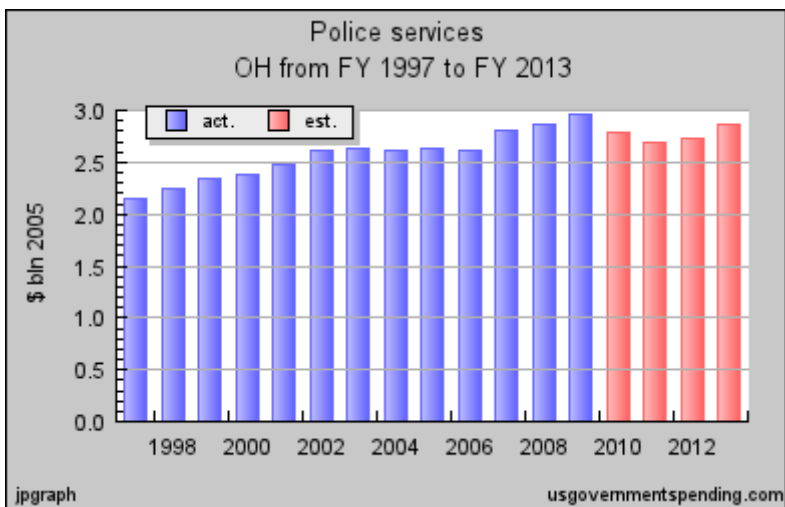
"Local police boost arsenals with free military weapons": What Could Possibly Go Wrong?

Nick Gillespie | May 8, 2012

From the state that calls itself "The Heart of It All" comes this terrifying image of cops morphing into military forces on the backs of "budget cuts" and "well-armed criminals."

A Dayton Daily News investigation found budget-challenged Ohio departments are increasingly using military surplus to arm and equip their staff — last year acquiring a record \$12 million in equipment and weapons through the Pentagon's 1033 program.

That was more than a third of the \$33 million in surplus gear obtained since the program started in the mid-1990s. On top of that, Ohio police have received more than 6,000 firearms valued at \$2 million, mostly M16 assault rifles.



“Everybody’s budget is dying,” [Dayton Police SWAT leader Maj. Robert] Chabali said....

The state data shows 23 police departments, from Toledo to tiny Uhrichsville, obtained free armored personnel carriers that look like small tanks without cannons, each with an original acquisition cost of \$244,844. The Allen County Sheriff’s Office in Lima has acquired more than \$4.8 million in gear, including \$491,000 worth of laser range finders. The Marion

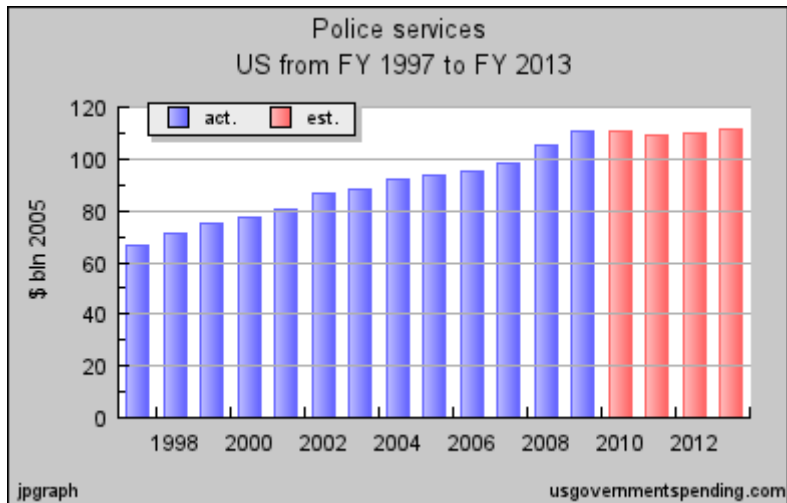
County Sheriff's Office got a helicopter, and police in Delaware, north of Columbus, got a grenade launcher that can fire tear gas canisters.

Are budgets really "dying"? It depends on your definition of death. There are two charts in this post. The first shows spending on police services in Ohio, the second on police services throughout the U.S. at all levels of government. Both are in inflation-adjusted dollars. While showing some minor reductions in recent years, reports of budgets for police dying are wildly exaggerated, to say the least.

The same pattern holds true for the total number of workers providing police services. In 2007, the total number of employees providing "police protection" at the state and local levels totaled 893,079. In 2009, that number had reached 913,532. In 2010, the latest year for which data is available, the number had reduced to 902,372. Between 2007, 2009, and 2010, the number of police officers went from 677,357 to 695,981 to 687,817. Having an officer level that's more than 10,000 higher than in 2007 doesn't fit anyone's definition of "dying." ([Source: U.S. Census government payroll data.](#))

But it's not like arming the cops with military gear can create problems, right? It's just giving "extra life" to material that's already been paid for, right? The Dayton Daily News offers up some examples such as

- A Mansfield-area SWAT team shot and killed Gilbert Rush in February 2007 after storming his home in an investigation of the alleged theft of baby clothes from Walmart. Rush wasn't the target of the investigation. His survivors filed a civil lawsuit against Mansfield and Richland County that is set for trial in federal court on July 30.
- On Jan. 4, 2008, the Lima SWAT team chose to bust a suspected drug dealer at his girlfriend's home while she and her six children were present. During the forced-entry raid, a SWAT officer shot and killed the unarmed girlfriend, Tarika Wilson, as she held a baby. Police gunfire also wounded the 13-month-old baby in the shoulder and blew off one of the baby's fingers. The city of Lima settled a subsequent lawsuit for \$2.5 million.



The story quotes from critics of the militarization of police, including former Reason staffer Radley Balko, whose [2006 "Overkill" report](#) for the Cato Institute remains a standard reference on the subject. Balko is now at the [Huffington Post](#) and still operates his must-read blog, [The Agitator](#). Read his Reason archive, which is full of appalling stories of SWAT-style raids gone wrong, [here](#). But in the end, police chiefs always seem to get the last word, whether we're talking funding from government or quotes in stories. Here's the the top cop of a small town explaining why his crew benefits from having an armored personnel carrier (and a semi to transport it).

Oliver acknowledged that some local residents don't see a need for Brimfield to have the vehicle, which has not been used since it was acquired in 2010.

"I respect that," Oliver said. But "I'd rather have it and not need it than need it and not have it. My job is to be ready. I don't play the odds. That's not how you win at police work and how you keep people safe."

Whole story, which includes a concise history of the SWAT concept, [here](#).