

Reason Magazine

More Reporting On the How and the Why of Police Militarization

Lucy Steigerwald | December 5, 2011

Over at *The Daily* is a good summary of a subject near and dear to long-time *Reason* readers — police militarization. The article mainly explains why every tiny town seems to suddenly have an amphibious tank and a sound cannon for its camouflage-clad cops.

Through its little-known “1033 program,” the Department of Defense gave away nearly \$500 million worth of leftover military gear to law enforcement in fiscal year 2011 — a new record for the program and a dramatic rise over past years’ totals, including the \$212 million in equipment distributed in 2010.

The surplus equipment includes grenade launchers, helicopters, military robots, M-16 assault rifles and armored vehicles.

And the program’s recent expansion shows no sign of slackening: Orders in fiscal year 2012 are up 400 percent over the same period in 2011, according to data provided to *The Daily* by the Pentagon’s Defense Logistics Agency.

Passed by Congress in 1997, the 1033 program was created to provide law-enforcement agencies with tools to fight drugs and terrorism. Since then, more than 17,000 agencies have taken in \$2.6 billion worth of equipment for nearly free, paying only the cost of delivery.

Experts say the recent surge is simply the continuation of a decades-long trend: the increasing use of military techniques and equipment by local police departments, tactics seen most recently in the crackdowns on Occupy Wall Street protesters across the country. But critics of the program say that the recent expansion of 1033 distributions should be setting off alarm bells.

“The trend toward militarization was well under way before 9/11, but it’s the federal policy of making surplus military equipment available almost for free that has poured fuel on this fire,” Tim Lynch, director of the libertarian Cato Institute’s project on criminal justice, told *The Daily*.

The rest [here](#), and it's well worth treading.

But of course Balko has another exhausting piece over at Huffington Post which presents a laundry list of some of the more familiar victims of the drug war that he has reported on over the years, as well as the increasingly militarized tactics of officers, and the increasingly absurd reasons for SWAT raids. It's a good, terrible overview for anyone who still might not know the scope of the drug war. (Send it to your friends! Send it to your enemies! Send it to [Gil Kerlikowske!](#))

But Balko also notes the partisan waffling that comes with police brutality; reminding all those who smirked at the pepper spray drenched screams of deluded young Occupiers that those boots are not always stomping hippies.

In the 1990s, it was the right wing that was up in arms over police militarization. Recall the outrage on the right over Waco, Ruby Ridge, and that striking photo from the Elian Gonzalez raid. The left largely remained silent. Right-wing radio hosts continued to rail against jack-booted thugs and federal storm-troopers, but that all died down once the Clinton administration left office. The militarization of federal law enforcement certainly didn't stop, but the Sept. 11 attacks and a friendly administration seemed to quell the conservatives' concerns. So long as law enforcement was targeting hippie protesters, drug offenders and alleged terrorist sympathizers, they were the good guys, not the jack-booted thugs.

The rest [here](#).

Reason on [police militarization](#).