

Russian Times

Battlefield US: Pentagon arms police departments with free heavy weaponry

December 7, 2011

The military-grade pepper-spray that's been all the rage with law enforcement agencies is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to an advanced arsenal of weaponry made available to police departments across the country.

It has become clear now that local PDs are stockpiling some seriously dangerous doodads free of cost as part of a little-known program from the Pentagon. You can thank Uncle Sam, the Department of Defense and your own American tax dollars for the 1033 Program, an initiative that is giving hundreds of millions of bucks' worth of military hardware from the DoD and putting it in the hands of your favorite neighborhood cop.

In 2011 alone, the Department of Defense forked over roughly \$500 million worth of military machinery to law enforcement agencies coast-to-coast that would have been left otherwise unused. In many instances, however, the goods are grabbed by sheriffs in smaller jurisdictions that don't have much need for the weaponry, other than to install fear within the community. The Daily reports that, according to documents made available by the Pentagon's Defense Logistics Agency, among those items offered up to officers at no cost at all last year were grenade launchers, helicopters, military robots, M-16 assault rifles and armored vehicles.

The year before, the 1033 Program aided local departments with \$212 million in weaponry. So far for Fiscal Year 2012, orders are up more than 400 percent compared with figures from the same time an year earlier.

Now it all makes sense why New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg says he [has his own army](#) with the NYPD.

Outside of Binghamton, NY in the small town of Oxford, WBNG News reports that the Sheriff's Office was recently made the recipient of an armored military Humvee through the 1033 Program. That addition to their arsenal, incurred only last November, accompanies a second armored vehicle that the Fort Drum military base pawned off on them only three months earlier.

"It's kind of had a corrupting influence on the culture of policing in America," Cato Institute Director Tim Lynch tells The Daily. "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."

The Daily adds that the program, passed by Congress in 1997, has so far allowed 17,000 agencies to have fun with the military's leftovers accounting for around \$2.6 billion worth of equipment. The only cost is often delivery, and in the case of those Humvees in Central New York, the local PD used money recovered in drug seizures to revamp the vehicles to more appropriately suit their needs.

Oxford, which boasted a population of less than 4,000 during the 2000 US Census, might not necessarily require an armored Army truck, however — let alone two. That doesn't mean that they are the only small towns that scoop up these deals from the military, though. In Hanceville, Alabama, for example, the fewer than 3,000 citizens of the southern American town have already accumulated more than \$250,000 in military equipment, reports the Cullman Times. Aiken, South Carolina, substantially larger with 29,494 residents as per the 2010 Census, has benefited from the program to the tune of \$100,000 since 2010, but mostly for items such as first-aid kits and boots, local officials say.

In nearby Richland County, however, the local sheriff can now cavort around town in a machine-gun ready personal carrier that he likes to call "The Peacemaker."

"The dynamic is that you have some officer go to the chief and say, people in next county have [military equipment], if we don't take it some other city will," adds the Cato Institute's Lynch. *"Then they acquire the equipment, they create a paramilitary unit, and everything seems fine."*

"My philosophy is that I'd rather have it and not need it than need it and not have it." Oxford, Alabama Police Chief Bill Partridge tells the Daily Caller.

That better safe than sorry ethos could cause problems within the community soon enough, though.

"But then one or two years pass," insists Lynch. *"They say, look we've got this equipment, this training and we haven't been using it. That's where it starts to creep into routine policing."*

Between the 1980s and mid-2000s, SWAT-style raids in America have increased by a factor of more than ten, reports Reason journalist Radley Balko. The result has been the scary solidifying of a police state and a fear installed in the homes of Americans across the country. Often these raids are executed by employing overzealous law enforcement methods under unnecessary circumstances, and in the case of [Jose Guerena](#), the former-Marine brutally executed during a raid at his Tucson, Arizona home earlier this year, the circumstances for the attacks are often muddled and the consequences, fatal.

To some officials, the enthusiastic practice of bulking up their arsenal is not much more than a scare tactic.

Sheriff Daniel T. McEathron told NV Daily last year, *"If somebody looks out and sees a Ford Crown Victoria sitting out there, they may not take you very seriously, but if they look out the window and see this thing sitting there, they're going to know you're serious."*

This thing? That's a Lenco BearCat G3, a bulletproof, off-road-capable, 8-ton armored vehicle that the Minnesota county sheriff managed to pick up for a price of \$237,000 — all covered with a federal grant.

In addition to those free firearms and the like made available through the 1033 Program, the Department of Homeland Security regularly offers up grants to small police departments to aid in the procurement of weaponry — whether or not they need it. The Daily reveals that Sheriff Bill Hutton of Washington County, Minnesota asked for the quarter of a million dollar grant to get the BearCat. Since receiving the tank-like truck, they've used it once to debrief a hostage after being recovered from the local SWAT. Hutton also asked for a 3-foot-tall, \$70,000 robot. Erie, Pennsylvania also added a BearCat to its arsenal as well, which

local SWAT team commander Lt. Les Fetterman equates to The Daily as a “community relations tool” — he says he brings it out to picnics and lets children play inside of it.

As escalating incidents across the country over reckless police departments resorting to military style raids, seizures and attacks on lawful citizens — accelerated by the thousands of Americans peacefully protesting in the Occupy Wall Street movement that has gained momentum in the last three months much to the chagrin of law enforcement — it is making more and more sense that those Army-esque [attacks](#) on Battlefield USA are being sponsored by just that — the US military.

“It’s totally contrary to what we think is good policing, which is community policing,” Joseph McNamara, former chief of police in Kansas City, Mo., and San Jose, Calif., adds to The Daily. *“The profile of these military police units invading a neighborhood like the occupation army is contrary to what you want to do as a police department. You want the public to feel comfortable calling you to report crime and supporting you in working against crime and coming forward as witnesses.”*

Attorney Arthur Rizer asks The Daily, *“If we’re training cops as soldiers, giving them equipment like soldiers, dressing them up as soldiers, when are they going to pick up the mentality of soldiers?”*

“If you look at the police department, their creed is to protect and to serve. A soldier’s mission is to engage his enemy in close combat and kill him. Do we want police officers to have that mentality? Of course not.”

Given last week’s move from Congress, we could see all walks of life of law enforcement sharing duties.

Even if these gargantuan gun and ridiculous weaponry don’t end up parked in front of your local police station, don’t worry — you’re sure to see them soon enough. Under the [National Defense Authorization Act](#) passed by Congress [last week](#), the US military will have legal jurisdiction to enforce the law on American citizens and detain and torture them indefinitely, without charge. And don’t think you’ll be able to hide, either—the Federal Aviation Administration [announced](#) last month that they will soon allow robotic, unmanned surveillance drone aircraft into the skies above the United States. AeroVironment Inc. has created a drone helicopter for police monitoring and intends on sending 18,000 of them to law enforcement agencies once the crafts have cleared for take-off.