

# INDIANA DAILY STUDENT

## COLUMN: Scale back police militarization

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President Trump is rolling back Obama-era restrictions on local law enforcement agencies' usage of surplus military equipment. This move falls in line with Trump's and Attorney General Jeff Sessions' law-and-order approach to stopping crime.

Unfortunately, much like the duo's approach to the war on drugs, further arming United States domestic law enforcement will only increase racial tensions, decrease trust in the government and strike a blow to personal liberty.

The Defense Department's 1033 Program funneled over \$4.3 billion worth of military gear to domestic law enforcement agencies between 1997 and 2014. Later in 2014, then-President Barack Obama struck down part of the program and banned police from receiving arms, such as bayonets and grenade launchers.

By reinstating this flow of equipment from the military to the police, Trump is telling Americans that they must be governed by a military-grade police force whose weapons they can never hope to contend with.

As it stands, the police are already too well armed. The American Civil Liberties Union argues that the ridiculous militarization of Special Weapons and Tactics forces has caused our law enforcement agencies to adopt a "warrior mentality."

These SWAT teams, which were originally created to deal with emergency situations such as active shooters, now spend most of their deployments looking for drugs. Minorities are 30 percent more likely to be targeted for such drug raids than whites.

Banging down doors and deploying teams of 20 or more heavily armed officers for a petty drug bust is excessive and unsettlingly authoritarian.

Expanding the arsenal of these forces isn't going to make anyone feel safer. If anything, it will deepen the current rift between American law enforcement and the public.

Ilya Shapiro, a scholar at the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank where I completed a summer internship, writes that over-deployment of SWAT teams increases the chance of harm to both officers and civilians for ordinary police work.

We don't need SWAT teams to raid homes for minor drug possession, and sending them only increases the risks for everyone involved.

President Trump's regulatory rollback will not only validate but will also encourage further aggressive policing, and police officers will increasingly look at the American public as enemy combatants rather than the community they're sworn to protect.

People will feel more surveilled than protected, more examined than looked after and more kept in line than kept safe.

Police militarization also makes it difficult to distinguish between voluntary and involuntary action. Though police can't simply walk up to someone and search them for drugs, it becomes very difficult to decline a search when officers appear wearing this.

Cops don't wear full camouflage in major cities to blend into the lush greenery. They do it to look like a military unit. Similarly, the grenade launchers and bayonets Trump wants to put back into law enforcement's hands will only serve to intimidate.

Americans need to push their local police departments to scale back SWAT activity and to stop accepting 1033 Program-issued military weaponry. Our police force is already far too militarized, and we need to intervene before the situation gets even further out of hand.