



A recent youtube video of a SWAT team raid on a Missouri family's home has gone viral. In it, police institute a "quick-knock" technique to serve a search warrant. Upon forcing their way into the house, gun shots can immediately be heard as police execute one of the family dogs and injure another (a corgi). The suspect's wife and seven year-old child watched the horrific scene unfold.

The homeowner was suspected of being a marijuana distributor, but when all was said and done, the police found less than a gram of marijuana in the house. The excessive use of force against this man's family for a misdemeanor infraction has sparked public outrage. It has been reported that several Columbia, MO police officers have received multiple death threats. The Chief of Police has stated he is reviewing his city's policies on raids because of the incident.

This publicized incident begs a couple of questions: Is this an isolated event and what is the point of such excessive police force?

The Drug War has been the motivating force behind the proliferation of what are commonly called Special Weapons and Tactics, or SWAT teams throughout the country. The vast majority of "quick-knock" or "no-knock" intrusions by these teams are intended to deliver narcotics search warrants. "Because these raids are often conducted based on tips from notoriously unreliable confidential informants, police sometimes conduct SWAT-style raids on the wrong home, or on the homes of nonviolent, misdemeanor drug users," says a white paper by the CATO Institute.

In 2006, CATO released its [policy paper](#) chronicling the "dramatic and unsettling rise" in the number of paramilitary police raids on American homes since the early '80s. As of four years ago, California and New York were leading the nation in botched SWAT team raids which victimized hundreds of innocent bystanders and their pets.

Proponents of police militarization called such incidents isolated and rare. At the same time, CATO proposed they were part of an epidemic of unwarranted police action. Here is an excerpt from the executive summary of the report, entitled 'Overkill: The Rise of Paramilitary Police Raids':

These increasingly frequent raids, 40,000 per year by one estimate, are needlessly subjecting nonviolent drug offenders, bystanders, and wrongly targeted civilians to the terror of having their homes invaded while they're sleeping, usually by teams of heavily armed paramilitary units dressed not as police officers but as soldiers. These raids bring unnecessary violence and provocation to nonviolent drug offenders, many of whom were guilty of only misdemeanors. The raids terrorize innocents when police mistakenly target the wrong residence. And they have resulted in dozens of needless deaths and injuries, not only of drug offenders, but also of police officers, children, bystanders, and innocent suspects.

The policy thinktank also provided an interactive [map](#) displaying data on a state per state basis. This information is broken down into several categories including death of an innocent, death of a nonviolent offender, raid on an innocent suspect, and unnecessary raids on doctors and sick people.

The [video](#) of the February Missouri raid highlights the extent to which our civil liberties have been eroded since the federal government declared a Drug War on its citizens four decades ago. Such raids are the result of paramilitary indoctrination of the enforcing agents involved. Their tactical training cements a mindset which views Americans residing in their own homes as "enemy combatants" and the killing of their pets as "collateral damage."

When officers of the peace become soldiers of the state, pitted against an innumerable and unseen enemy, they are more inclined to use shock and awe tactics to send a



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message to the next would-be "drug dealer" (or recreational user) – this war isn't over.

There is no evidence to suggest that the trend toward total militarization of police protocols has abated in this country; however, there are a growing number of law enforcement officers who are organizing against the establishment line and seeking an end to narcotics prohibition. This is how they hope to end the war on drugs.

Fellow CAIVN contributor W. E. Messamore has written about one such organization [here](#).

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