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Nationalizing the Police Is Not the Answer

As riots and lawlessness spread across the United States in the wake of the tragic killing of a black man in police custody in Minneapolis, Minnesota, some have opted to urge a transfer of more police authority away from local and state government, and into the hands of the federal government. This supposed solution to any problems of law enforcement is nonsensical, and it will lead to less, not more, respect for the rights of individuals — of all ethnicities — in our country.



As racial tensions mount, and national media outlets throw gasoline on the fire, attention has been diverted from the fundamental question as to what level of government has the primary constitutional responsibility for law enforcement in our federal system of government. Those who favor increased power for government at the federal level, at the expense of state and local government, use accusations of racism and “police brutality” to argue for transferring law-enforcement responsibility to government officials in Washington, D.C.

First of all, there are real cases of police misconduct. Any time a person is handed governmental power, citizens must be aware that there is potential for abuse of that power. But checks on the police do exist, which can keep police wrongs to a minimum.

What is *not* the answer is abolishing local control of police. Neither is placing all police power in the hands of federal officials.

Neither history nor logic supports the position that police misbehavior would be reduced if the badge an officer wore said “U.S. Police” rather than “Minneapolis Police.” In many of those countries with nationalized police forces, the liberties of the people are regularly ignored. When Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, he made every effort to reduce the power of state governments, including their historic and constitutional control over law enforcement. Hermann Goring first suggested to Hitler that he transfer all law-enforcement authority to the state secret police — the infamous Gestapo.

Of course, some readers would protest that America is not Nazi Germany. But human nature is no different in our country than in totalitarian regimes such as Hitler’s National Socialist dictatorship, or Joseph Stalin’s communist government. That is why our Founders wisely placed checks and balances on the federal government they created with the Constitution.

We could cite multiple examples of how *federal* law enforcement has abused American citizens. The “war” on drugs is an example of how federal law enforcement officials can abuse their power every bit as much as a local police officer. Numerous drug raids have gone wrong, which should caution any person who wants to transfer such authority to federal officials.

Many other instances of abuses of American citizens by federal law enforcement can be cited, but two illustrate the dangers especially well — Ruby Ridge and Waco. Randy Weaver moved to Ruby Ridge in northern Idaho to live as a recluse with his family. Federal agents raided his property, killing Weaver’s



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teenage son, his pregnant wife, and his dog. Weaver's wife was shot while standing in the doorway, holding a young child in her arms. Weaver was never found guilty of any crime at all.

Even more infamous was the raid staged by the ATF on the Branch Davidian compound outside Waco, Texas in 1993. It was a raid almost certain to lead to the deaths of Davidians and agents, and it did. After the raid's failure, the *Federal* Bureau of Investigation took over, and Americans looked on in horror on TV as a gigantic fireball engulfed the buildings, taking the lives of 76 people, including multiple young children, on April 19, 1993.

The DEA drug raids "gone wrong." The Weaver raid "gone wrong." The Davidian raid "gone wrong." All ended in disaster, and all are examples of failures of federal law enforcement, not local police work.

This drive to nationalize all law enforcement continues. One suggestion — or typically, a "demand" — by anti-police groups is for the creation of police review boards. Not surprisingly, local anti-police leftists who wish to undermine legitimate police work dominate these boards.

It should be remembered that millions of interactions occur each year between local police and members of public — of all ethnicities — which end peacefully, millions of times. Times when a police officer behaves in a manner that results in the death of an unfortunate citizen such as George Floyd are in a tiny minority of those cases. When it does happen, it is tragic. We can strive to reduce such incidents, but we can never eliminate all injustice, because we must recruit police officers from the human race.

But turning over law enforcement to the federal government would mean turning over control of our lives to officials who are also flawed human beings.

The "Support Your Local Police" effort was among the most successful campaigns of the limited-government John Birch Society (JBS) organization. A popular James Garner movie even used the take-off for a comedic western, *Support Your Local Sheriff*. The Law Enforcement Assistance Agency (LEAA), a federal agency that dealt directly with local police, was eventually abolished, largely as a result of the tireless efforts of the JBS. Many of the local review boards were terminated as well, as the campaign took hold.

Certainly, there should be vigilance against abuse of power by local police, but turning over control to a federalized police force would be a cure worse than the disease.

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