



Obama Flooding U.S. Streets With “Weapons of War” for Local Police

The federal government and the Obama administration are under fire for a variety of unconstitutional programs aimed at both [militarizing](#) and [controlling](#) local police and law enforcement, including supplying a vast array of sophisticated U.S. Defense Department “weapons of war” to city and county governments. Billions of dollars in military equipment has already been handed to municipal police departments and county sheriffs’ offices nationwide under the rapidly expanding federal schemes, but concerns from across the political spectrum are growing quickly as well.



This year alone, over 150 so-called “mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles,” or MRAPs, used by U.S. forces in Iraq, were distributed by the administration to local police departments within the “Homeland.” The Department of Homeland Security, meanwhile, has been at the center of [mounting controversy for over a year as it stockpiled](#) the beastly military vehicles and massive quantities of ammunition for domestic use. At the same time, federal efforts to [unconstitutionally commandeer state and local law enforcement](#) are accelerating.

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Criticism of the controversial and growing law-enforcement militarization schemes, however, is also escalating across the political spectrum. One of the biggest concerns expressed by opponents is the threat to the independence and local accountability of police represented by unconstitutional federal handouts — most of which come with “strings” attached. Critics have also blasted what they say is the increased potential for unnecessary escalation of violence, the growing presence of “weapons of war” aimed at Americans on U.S. streets, and the huge costs to already-struggling taxpayers drowning in debts incurred by Washington, D.C. politicians.

However, amid mounting outrage and concerns over what [more than two thirds of U.S. voters say is an “out-of-control” federal government that is “threatening basic civil liberties.”](#) the administration is stepping up its showering of military equipment on local law enforcement officials. Even the establishment press is now reporting on the growing controversies — especially after the distribution of some 165, so far this year, 18-ton armored personnel carriers with gun turrets originally built for U.S. troops on Middle East battlefields. Another 731 have been requested, according to news reports.

Of course, the federal programs distributing “surplus” military equipment to local law enforcement are not new. In fact, they go back decades. However, as *The New American* [reported](#) in 2011, the schemes are expanding at a record pace under the Obama administration. Ironically, perhaps, the federal flood of military hardware comes amid the executive branch’s [fiendish assaults on the unalienable right of the people to keep and bear arms](#) — often marketed by the current administration with claims that



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on December 2, 2013

“weapons of war” do not belong on the streets of the “Homeland.”

Despite the president’s radical and deeply deceptive rhetoric attacking fundamental rights guaranteed under the U.S. Constitution, everyday Americans do not actually have access to military-grade weaponry — at least not without jumping through government hoops and mazes of red tape. Thanks to the federal government, though, more than a few local police departments, which the administration is increasingly seeking to control, do have access to “weapons of war” — drones, tanks, helicopters, grenade launchers, Humvees, MRAPs, and much more. All of it is being provided at U.S. taxpayer expense.

Just in New York State, the Associated Press reported last week that five county sheriff’s departments and three other police agencies have received MRAPs from the Defense Department this year. “It’s armored. It’s heavy. It’s intimidating. And it’s free,” said Albany County Sheriff Craig Apple, one of the officials whose department now has a federally provided MRAP beast of war. Another one of the armored personnel carriers went to the Ohio State University campus police, the AP reported. Dallas County and High Springs, Florida, each received one as well, along with numerous other cities across America.

The heavy military vehicles, costing U.S. taxpayers \$500,000 each, were originally purchased by the U.S. Defense Department to help American troops battling heavily armed insurgents in Iraq. Now, they will be used by local police across America for purposes that are not entirely clear or well defined. Proponents of the scheme claim the “weapons of war” will largely be used as a “shock and awe”-type show of force for hostage situations and similar emergency scenarios — primarily to protect police officers. Critics, however, are becoming increasingly suspicious of the program.

“It’s a Trojan Horse, of course, one that is sold to communities as a benefit, all the while the real purpose is to keep the defense industry churning out profits, bring police departments in line with the military, and establish a standing army,” [argued](#) The Rutherford Institute President John Whitehead, an attorney whose non-profit focuses on protecting constitutionally guaranteed rights. “The results are deadly, as can be seen in the growing numbers of unarmed civilians shot by police during relatively routine encounters and in the use of SWAT teams to carry out relatively routine tasks.”

Whitehead, whose book [A Government of Wolves: The Emerging American Police State](#) documents the federal government’s efforts to militarize America’s local law-enforcement departments, goes on to cite a troubling array of outrageous abuses in a [column about the trends](#) published earlier this month. “Thus, while recycling unused military equipment might sound thrifty and practical, the ramifications are proving to be far more dangerous and deadly,” he said. “This is what happens when you have police not only acquiring the gear of American soldiers, but also the mindset of an army occupying hostile territory.”

Indeed, the entire function and traditional role of local police in America is being undermined in favor of something alien to U.S. history and law, Whitehead suggested. “In this way, the American citizen is no longer seen as an employer or master to be served by public servants like police officers,” he wrote. “With police playing the part of soldiers on the battlefield and the American citizen left to play the part of an enemy combatant, it’s a pretty safe bet that this particular exercise in the absurd will not have a happy ending.”

The John Birch Society, a constitutionalist organization (and affiliate of this magazine), has for decades been running a high-profile campaign to [“Support Your Local Police and Keep Them Independent.”](#) It,



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too, is concerned about the accelerating trends. “We were successful in stopping Police Civilian Review Boards in the 1960s and 70s and in getting the federal government’s Law Enforcement Assistance Administration abolished in 1982,” the group said on its website for the “Support Your Local Police” campaign. “Today, more than ever, we need grassroots activists to continue working to keep our local police under the supervision of local elected officials and free from state and federal control.”

In addition to criticism from constitutionalist, libertarian, and conservative forces, the federal schemes to militarize local law enforcement have also come under fire from groups such as the American Civil Liberties Union. “One of our concerns with this is it has a tendency to escalate violence,” ACLU Center for Justice senior counsel Kara Dansky was quoted as saying by the Associated Press in a recent article about the controversial MRAP deliveries.

Meanwhile, in addition to the militarization, the Obama administration is also stepping up its efforts to turn traditionally independent local police departments into mere administrative arms of Washington, D.C.’s growing “Homeland Security” apparatus. *The New American* magazine’s Joe Wolverton has [written extensively](#) on the ongoing machinations. At the same time, the federal government is also working quietly but steadily to create its own fledgling national police force — even [outfitting Homeland Security agents with “Police” outfits](#).

Aside from being unconstitutional, critics say there are many reasons why it is past time to rein in the federal government and its efforts to transform American law enforcement — not expand Washington, D.C.’s coercive power even further. Opponents of the administration’s escalating militarization and control schemes aimed at U.S. communities argue that Congress must address the expanding threats to citizens, liberty, and local police. The trends are clear, and without serious efforts to address them, the consequences could easily prove to be nightmarish for America.

Photo of Warren County, N.Y., Undersheriff Shawn Lamouree in front of the department’s MRAP: AP Images

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