



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 24, 2014

## Secret Military Training Blurs Line Between Police and Soldiers

As the military transitions into a tech-heavy force, increasingly reliant on robots and drones, local police forces are looking less like law enforcement and more like heavily armored combat units. Now, it seems they are starting to train like them, as well.

A story published by *The State* newspaper in Columbia, South Carolina, reported on recent [secret joint training missions](#) between U.S. Army special forces and the Richland County (South Carolina) Sheriff's Department.



The article describes training exercises being conducted by “unidentified units” from Ft. Bragg, North Carolina. Ft. Bragg is the home of the elite [U.S. Army Special Operations Command \(USASOC\)](#) and the super-secret, super-deadly Delta Force.

A spokesman for the Richland County Sheriff's Department refused to identify who was participating in the exercise or why it was being carried out. The department did, however, [issue a press release](#), warning that the war games could get loud. “Citizens may see military and departmental vehicles traveling in and around rural and metropolitan areas and may hear ordnance being set off or fired which will be simulated/blanks and controlled by trained personnel,” it declared.

As for why such combat simulations were necessary, the statement explained that they were a result of “Sheriff Leon Lott’s longstanding commitment to making sure that deputies are trained and prepared for every event and potential threat and his desire to assist the military to ensure their preparations.”

This synthesis of police and military is a threat to both civil liberty and a clear distinction between the purposes of the two organizations. The integration has progressed so far, though, that even the mainstream press is taking notice.

In [an essay published in the Wall Street Journal last August](#), Radley Balko, author of the [Rise of the Warrior Cop](#), presented chilling and convincing evidence of the blurring of the line between cop and soldier:

Driven by martial rhetoric and the availability of military-style equipment — from bayonets and M-16 rifles to armored personnel carriers — American police forces have often adopted a mind-set previously reserved for the battlefield. The war on drugs and, more recently, post-9/11 antiterrorism efforts have created a new figure on the U.S. scene: the warrior cop — armed to the teeth, ready to deal harshly with targeted wrongdoers, and a growing threat to familiar American liberties.

Balko rightly connects the menace of the martial police with the decline in liberty and a disintegration of legal boundaries between sheriffs and generals:

Americans have long been wary of using the military for domestic policing. Concerns about



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potential abuse date back to the creation of the Constitution, when the founders worried about standing armies and the intimidation of the people at large by an overzealous executive, who might choose to follow the unhappy precedents set by Europe's emperors and monarchs.

Given the critical role played by sheriffs in the protection of constitutionally guaranteed liberty, it is dismaying to read story after story describing the anxious acceptance — and occasionally the full-time petitioning — of military materiel by county lawmen.

It's not just the conversion from cop to "warfighter" that is changing the landscape of law enforcement in America, however.

As [The New American has chronicled](#), the Department of Homeland Security has their hooks in the precinct and sheriff's department, as well.

Even the Richland County Sheriff's Department's own website helps explain to citizens its "critical role" in [preventing terrorist attacks](#):

As we are often reminded by events across America and around the world, disaster can strike at any time. Terrorism in its many forms, weather and other natural disasters, and accidental emergencies are regularly highlighted in the news. Public safety and emergency response agencies on the local, state, and federal levels are working to prevent and prepare for all types of catastrophes, but there is more that can be done.

Citizens have a critical role in partnering with public officials to help families, neighborhoods, and entire communities be better prepared.

There is little debate that the "Knowledge is power" adage is true. Also, we know that panic is caused primarily by fear. If citizens remain informed and educated about the dangers we face in today's world, this knowledge can translate into a powerful means of reducing panic in the face of tragedy.

The tragedy, it seems, is not the threat of a terrorist attack, but the nearly constant assault by police on the fundamental rights of citizens, an attack made more deadly by the use of military-grade weapons, vehicles, and tactics.

Maybe all the money and materiel flowing from the feds to local police is to prepare the latter to quell popular uprisings that result from the continued eradication by the former of freedom and individual liberty. One expert thinks that may be the case.

Jim Fitzgerald worked for eight years as a vice and narcotics squad detective in Newark, New Jersey, before joining the staff of The John Birch Society. He is point man for the conservative organization's ["Support Your Local Police"](#) initiative.

In an interview with *The New American*, Fitzgerald said there is "virtually no use" for the military-grade equipment being bought by local law enforcement with DHS grant money. "The only reason to have this equipment is to use it," he said, and it is likely it would be used against local citizens who have risen up and created some sort of civil disorder.

DHS, Fitzgerald believes, may be anticipating these riots and looks to them as a justification for the militarization of the police. "They [DHS grants] are not good, not healthy, and not constitutional," Fitzgerald added.

Balko agrees. In his *Wall Street Journal* piece he reports:



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In my own research, I have collected over 50 examples in which innocent people were killed in raids to enforce warrants for crimes that are either nonviolent or consensual (that is, crimes such as drug use or gambling, in which all parties participate voluntarily). These victims were bystanders, or the police later found no evidence of the crime for which the victim was being investigated. They include Katherine Johnston, a 92-year-old woman killed by an Atlanta narcotics team acting on a bad tip from an informant in 2006; Alberto Sepulveda, an 11-year-old accidentally shot by a California SWAT officer during a 2000 drug raid; and Eurie Stamps, killed in a 2011 raid on his home in Framingham, Mass., when an officer says his gun mistakenly discharged. Mr. Stamps wasn't a suspect in the investigation.

What would it take to dial back such excessive police measures? The obvious place to start would be ending the federal grants that encourage police forces to acquire gear that is more appropriate for the battlefield. Beyond that, it is crucial to change the culture of militarization in American law enforcement.

One organization is working to bring about that change and to help local law enforcement return to their traditional role as guardians of constitutional liberty.

The Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (CSPOA) recognizes the invaluable role of sheriffs in preserving, protecting, and defending the Constitution in the counties. [Their mission statement](#) establishes the group's noble goals:

This is our plan, our goal and our quest. We are forming the Constitutional Peace Officers Association which will unite all public servants and sheriffs, to keep their word to uphold, defend, protect, preserve, and obey the Constitutions of the United States of America. We already have hundreds of police, sheriffs, and other officials who have expressed a desire to be a part of this Holy Cause of Liberty.

We are going to train and vet them all, state by state, to understand and enforce the constitutionally protected Rights of the people they serve, with an emphasis on State Sovereignty and local autonomy. Then these local governments will issue our new Declaration to the Federal Government regarding the abuses that we will no longer tolerate or accept. Said declaration will be enforced by our Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers. In short, the CSPOA will be the army to set our nation free. This will guarantee this movement remains both peaceful and effective.

If the military and law enforcement continue conducting secret (no media were allowed to participate in or observe the training in Richland County) combat simulations in towns and counties, if police and sheriffs continue devoting time and resources in requesting millions of dollars in grants from the DHS, then the separation between the roles of these organizations will disappear and so will constitutionally protected liberty.

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