

Duplicate

The Explosive Growth Of Police With A Military Orientation

By: Lucino Hamilton

Politicians in the U.S., as well as the mass media, have almost universally ignored the continuous expansion of the police. A significant move in a sea of policies (and absence of policies) which aided the unprecedented expansion of U.S. prisons. Rather than questioning the idea of more and more police doing things that used to be done by neighbors and community groups; rather than questioning has the U.S. reached a political reality where it does not have, will not obtain, and cannot command the consent of the people without a permanent police presence, those in power seem stuck on expanding the police far beyond what can be justified by any comparison of benefits.

A cursory look suggest that adding hundreds of thousands of police on the streets of America has not been motivated by altruism: making us safer. Not when their mandate has been the enforcement of petty crimes like graffiti and loitering. Or the puzzling fact that their duties do not include policing what the president of the American Economic Association, Irving Fisher, calls the "great peril today"---the "striking inequality of capital." Or why after the lost of 8.7 million jobs, and the lost of somewhere between \$6 trillion and \$12 trillion linked to subprime mortgages, an industry based on fraud, that police have not been retrained and redeployed to police the predatory nature of the financial industry. I can hear people now, "but that is not the job of the police." My reply, "why not?" It is clear that whatever regulatory measures that were in place, they were grossly ineffective.

A recent invention, the paid police force dates back to 1829 in the U.K., although it was familiar before in France, Russia and elsewhere. It rapidly grew in power and complexity in the U.S. immediately after Reconstruction, and is now considered to be necessary almost everywhere and by almost everyone. Police powers vary from place to place, but are near absolute and in accordance with the political structure; being the instrument to enforce the law. Its nature is partly determined by the character of the law that it enforces. Given the power that police possess legal provisions for redress are insufficient, in that they do not override the tools of intimidation and compulsion which the police bring to bear on those they police.

Indeed, a number of politicians and journalist have argued that living with more and more police must be reinterpreted in a more positive light. Some have even argued that a state in which political stability has come to be, or to seem to be, dependent upon police occupation, and in which the police are given powers suitable to that, should exist without "meddlesome oversights." In spite of the fact that over the past three decades the extraordinary

proliferation of the police has been accompanied by police models becoming increasingly militarized in philosophy and practice. Which has precipitated a change in the breadth and depth of police control. Actually, this has lead to the creation of government sanctioned para-military style units i.e., the development of police with a soldier mentality.

Traditionally, at least in theory, the function of the police had been that of peace officers working as allies with neighborhoods and communities, rather than just being antagonist. But with the end of the cold war, and weapons contractors successfully marketing their hardware to civilian police forces, police have become more military in their orientation. Performing as if they are at war. Mantras such as "war on drugs" and "war on crime" have become part of the culture, and so have their consequences.

Making a case for the development of special units that employ specialized equipment and tactics when confronting heavily armed bank robbers or a barricade situation would be one thing, but doing so during routine traffic stops and serving felony arrest warrants is not only irresponsible, but criminal. The deployment of military operations and weapons (e.g., wearing tactical body armor, carrying high power assault weapons, the use of combat tactics and maneuvers such as flash grenades and suppression fire), and possessing the mentality that neighborhoods and communities are war zones, has blurred the line between police and military. Effectively repealing the Posse Comitatus Act (the ban on using U.S. troops in domestic law enforcement). This phenomenon has affected large cities and small rural areas alike.

While the continuous expansion of the police was without question the result of "tough on crime" policies that were integral in growing the U.S. prison population (much of this increase can be attributed to the Community Oriented Policing Services program which was signed into law by president Bill Clinton in 1994), It was also the result of apathy and fear. Without sacrifice and courage the U.S. may soon not only lead the world in incarceration rates, but para-military police forces, too.

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