



Ferguson, New York Cases Used to Push Nationalized Police

Recent media coverage of lethal police actions in Ferguson, Missouri, and New York City has focused attention on the role of local police forces in America. As racial questions have dominated the news coverage, attention has been diverted from the fundamental question of what level of government has the primary constitutional responsibility for law enforcement in our federal system.



Those who favor increased power for government at the federal level, at the expense of state and local government, use accusations of “police brutality” to argue for transferring law-enforcement responsibility to government officials in Washington, D.C.

There is no doubt that real cases of police misconduct do exist. Any time a person is handed governmental power, citizens must be alert for some abuse of that power. But checks on the police do exist, so that police wrongs can be reduced to a minimum.

However, abolishing local control of the police is not the answer. And neither is placing all police power in the hands of federal officials.

John Birch Society CEO Art Thompson, in an article at [jbs.org](#) on why we should support the continued independence of local police, noted, “Actually, the United States is one of the last countries, if not the last, to have widespread local police power instead of the types of national systems that exist elsewhere.”

The proposition that turning all law enforcement over to a *national* government would eliminate (or even drastically reduce) police misbehavior is not borne out by either history or logic. No one can seriously disagree with the fact that in nations with nationalized police forces, the liberties of the people are severely curtailed. Totalitarians dictatorships, such as Stalin’s Russia, or Hitler’s Germany, prove the point.

After Hitler came to power in Germany, he made every effort to reduce the power of state governments, including their historical and constitutional control over the general police power. Hermann Göring first suggested to Hitler that he give all law-enforcement authority to the Gestapo (the secret state police).

On June 17, 1936, Hitler unified all police forces under the leadership of Heinrich Himmler. The Gestapo operated without judicial review, and had the power to place individuals in “protective custody.” Under such custody, the person being held actually signed a request to be jailed, supposedly to be protected from bodily harm. Of course, failure to sign the request form no doubt led to such harm — from the nationalized police force.

At this point, some readers might point out that our government is not like that of Nazi Germany. But human nature is no different in America from in totalitarian countries. Recognizing this, our Founders wisely placed checks and balances on the federal government they had just created.



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In his article at [jbs.org](#), Art Thompson pointed to two federal campaigns that have worked to increase national control over local police: the War on Drugs and the War on Terror. Should someone object to abuses by federal agents in either of these two areas, the objector is swiftly condemned as being “for drugs” or “for terror.”

The “War” on Drugs is an example of how federal law-enforcement officials can abuse their power just as much as any local policeman. Numerous examples of drug raids gone wrong should give any believer in the concept of individual liberty pause about handing over all law-enforcement power to the federal beast.

In Manchester, New Hampshire, for example, 49-year-old grandmother Lillian Alonzo was shot by an agent of the federal Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) during a raid on her home to locate “drug money.” DEA agent Michael Connolly said his foot got caught in her bedroom door after he kicked it in, causing him to lose his balance, whereupon his Glock 9 mm fired and Alonzo was hit.

Regardless of the questions surrounding Connolly’s story, the point is that the DEA had risked the lives of three agents, children inside the home, and an innocent woman, simply to retrieve “drug money” (which was not found). Though this case did not receive the national publicity that the police shooting in Ferguson did, this was a *federal* drug raid, not bungling by local cops, or the actions of a local police officer defending himself from a potentially deadly assault.

Many other infamous instances of abuses of American citizens by federal law enforcement could be cited. Two cases in which the tragic loss of lives well illustrates the dangers of turning over all police powers to the feds are known simply by their locations: Ruby Ridge and Waco.

Randy Weaver moved to Ruby Ridge in northern Idaho to live as a recluse with his family. After losing a lawsuit to Weaver, his neighbor, Terry Kinnison, told federal authorities that Weaver wanted to kill the pope, the president, and the governor. Federal agents interviewed Weaver, but made no arrest.

These allegations did bring Weaver to the attention of federal law enforcement, however. An informant with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (still known as ATF) made the claim that Weaver had sold him two sawed-off shotguns. Weaver, who had no criminal record, asserted that the agent sawed off the barrels after the sale. This led to a federal indictment against Weaver for possession of illegal weapons. In serving a federal bench warrant, ATF agents raided Weaver’s secluded property at Ruby Ridge, killing Weaver’s teenage son, his pregnant wife, and his dog. Weaver was never found guilty of any crime.

Even more notorious was the raid staged by the ATF on the compound of the Branch Davidians, an offshoot of the Seventh-Day Adventists, located nine miles northeast of Waco, Texas. The leader of the Davidians was Vernon Howell, who had taken the name David Koresh. Koresh had been accused of physical abuse of children, statutory rape, and polygamy, but Texas officials investigated and found no reason to charge him.

Despite this, concern for “the children” inside the compound known as Mount Carmel was cited as another reason for the ATF raid of February 28, 1993. Of course, federal authorities had absolutely no jurisdiction over any such alleged crimes, and Texas officials had already concluded their investigations of those allegations, taking no action.

When Koresh was informed that the ATF had heard he was dealing in illegal automatic weapons at Mount Carmel, he offered to let the ATF come out and inspect both his weapons and his paperwork. Koresh did make money trading at gun shows, always keeping the required paperwork. One Davidian,



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Paul Fatta, was a licensed federal firearms dealer.

Instead, the ATF obtained a search warrant, not on the grounds that Koresh had either purchased or sold illegal weapons, but that he *might* be modifying legal arms into illegal guns. The ATF also claimed that Koresh was operating a meth lab. This enabled the ATF to obtain military assets under the federal War on Drugs. The truth is, however, that Koresh had dismantled the meth lab years earlier after he took over the Davidian leadership, and turned it over to local authorities for destruction.

Despite such flimsy justification, the ATF staged a military-style raid on the compound, rather than simply walking up to the front door and serving the warrant. When the Davidians responded by fighting back, this resulted in the deaths of four agents and six Davidians. After the raid's failure, the FBI took over and conducted a 51-day siege. Using tanks, the FBI began knocking down the walls of the compound, culminating in a gigantic fireball (blamed by both sides on the other side) which took the lives of 76 people on April 19, 1993.

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

When first running for president, Senator Barack Obama declared, "We cannot continue to rely on our military in order to achieve the national security objectives that we've set. We've got to have a civilian national security force that's just as powerful, just as strong, just as well funded." In other words, Obama wants a national police force just as strong as our military.

To combat efforts to nationalize law enforcement, The John Birch Society launched a campaign in the 1960s entitled "Support Your Local Police — *and Keep Them Independent!*" The concern of the JBS was that increased violence against local police had led to a strong police reaction, making them "look vicious and draconian," CEO Art Thompson explained.

"This set the stage for the Left's call for federal control over police departments, as well as leftist-inspired police review boards," Thompson added. Not surprisingly, local leftists usually dominated these boards.

"It caused a great deal of second-guessing in the field when policemen had to make split-second decisions and lowered police morale overall," Thompson recalled. "The boards usurped the responsibility of not only the city councils, but several other legitimate agencies as well."

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

The drive to nationalize the local police continues. The Left never gives up on it aims. Sometimes the method is through bullying, such as proclamations from the attorney general, or statements from the president himself, as when President Obama declared that some local police "acted stupidly." Other methods are more subtle. The federal government uses funding, training, and outfitting of local police departments, and even handing over military equipment to local police departments (blurring the lines between law enforcement and the military).

Local officials, hungry for the "free" money coming from the federal government, should beware. As has been seen in highway and education funding across the country, along with federal money comes



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increased federal control.



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