



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on March 27, 2014

States Slowly Demanding SWAT Team Transparency

Examples of no-knock raids performed by SWAT teams on innocents across the country have even raised the consciousness of the London-based *Economist* magazine, which declared [in its most recent issue](#) that “America’s police have become too militarized.” It opened with the story of the raid on the home of Sally Prince in Ankeny, Iowa, by a SWAT team fully helmeted and masked with guns drawn and carrying shields. They performed a no-knock raid, blasting the front door off its hinges with a battering ram and rushing inside. They were searching for \$1,000 worth of clothes and electronics allegedly bought with a stolen credit card, none of which they found.



The writers could just as easily opened with [the story of Hank McGee](#) sleeping in his trailer house near Dallas, Texas, early Thursday morning, December 19, 2013 when a SWAT team entered without knocking, looking for drugs. Or they could have opened with the botched no-knock raid in Ross County near Chillicothe, Ohio, a few days earlier when a SWAT team member, preparing to enter a home in a no-knock raid, accidentally discharged his firearm, instantly killing a visitor sitting inside.

Or they could have highlighted the ghastly miscarriage of justice that took place back in 2008 when a SWAT team entered, without knocking first, the home of Tracy Ingle, who was sound asleep at the time. Standing outside his bedroom window, team members observed Ingle getting out of bed in what they thought was a threatening manner, and shot him — five times.

In fact, there have been so many SWAT team raids — estimated to be just 3,000 in 1980 but, according to Peter Kraska, a professor at Eastern Kentucky University’s School of Justice Studies, now exceeding 50,000 a year — that author Radley Balko has filled 400 pages of his book *Rise of the Warrior Cop* with them. There have been so many, declared Balko, that “the home is no longer a place of sanctuary, the Fourth Amendment has been gutted, and police today have been conditioned to see citizens they serve as ... an enemy.” Balko is also the author of the 2006 book *Overkill: The Rise of Paramilitary Police Raids in America*.

These raids often take place at night or in the early morning hours, with SWAT team members tossing “flash-bang” grenades into the residence in order to blind, deafen, and confuse their targets. In *Rise of the Warrior Cop*, Balko recorded more than 50 examples of innocents who have been murdered as a result of these botched raids, noting that some homeowners, thinking they were being invaded by criminals, fired back, wounding and sometimes killing a team member.

One state, Maryland, passed a law in 2009 requiring police agencies to track and record all their SWAT team raids so citizens could see just how egregious some of the raids are. Another, Utah, is considering a similar bill — SB 185: Law Enforcement Transparency — which would require police SWAT teams there to record and report their activities as well.



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The data obtained from Maryland SWAT teams in 2012 reveal some unnerving statistics:

- Since 2009 there have been between four and five SWAT team raids every day in Maryland;
- In Prince George's County, with a population of just 864,000 and the highest crime rate in the Washington Metro area, there were nearly two SWAT team raids every day;
- Almost all those raids were to serve search warrants;
- Two out of three of them used forced entry;
- Half of them were for Class II (non-violent) crimes; and
- A third of the raids resulted in no arrests.

The Libertas Institute, whose purpose is to "advance the cause of liberty within the State of Utah," supports SB 185 and has published its [policy analysis](#) of the bill. It too opened with the story of another botched SWAT team raid, this time at the home of Mayor Cheye Calvo of Prince George's County, Maryland, who suffered the indignity and trauma of a SWAT team raid based upon a sting operation that went bad. In the process the team shot and killed his two dogs and arrested Calvo and his mother-in-law who was living with him. Said Calvo, "I thought it was a home invasion. I was fearful that I was about to be executed."

He pushed for Maryland's transparency law, only to discover that it was opposed by every police organization in the state. The bill passed Maryland's House 126-9, and unanimously in the Senate.

The Utah bill is more detailed, and demands more information on SWAT team raids than does Maryland's legislation, including the following:

- Whether the officers involved were identified to the target;
- The reason for the raid;
- The type of warrant obtained, and if none, why not;
- A threat assessment report after the event;
- Number of arrests made, if any;
- Evidence seized, if any;
- Forcible entry required, or not;
- If a firearm was discharged and if so, by whom and how many rounds fired;
- Was the team met with resistance;
- Were any team members or targeted persons injured or killed; and
- Were any animals injured or killed in the incident.

Libertas supports the bill, but called it "superficial" as it does not publicize the actual warrants themselves, the identities of officers or suspects, interview transcripts, or other details. Said Libertas, this information will allow "lawmakers and the people they represent [to] have a finger on the pulse of police warrant services around Utah."

Much more than this needs to be done to stop and then reverse the descent of the country into a police state. For decades The John Birch Society has used the slogan "Support Your Local Police." But often the second part of that slogan is forgotten: "and Keep Them Independent." The closer the police power



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is to the people it represents, the more likely excesses such as these will be prevented. Even tacitly transferring such “transparency” requirements to the state government is an admission that the local police are no longer capable of reining in those excesses on their own.

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