



After Militarizing Police, Obama Urges “Peace” in Ferguson

During a public statement issued on August 14, Obama attacked local police in Ferguson, Missouri, for the heavily militarized and widely criticized response to unrest following the shooting of 18-year-old Michael Brown. Aside from inappropriately meddling in state and local affairs that, constitutionally speaking, should not be an official concern of the president or the federal government, the irony and stench of hypocrisy surrounding the whole situation and [Obama’s role in militarizing the police](#) has been largely overlooked so far.



It was the Obama administration, of course, that has done [more to militarize local law enforcement than perhaps any other president in U.S. history](#). Among other troubling schemes that have accelerated under the current occupant of the White House: providing even more “surplus” military weapons from the Defense Department, and massive unconstitutional bribes from the Department of Homeland Security. Both schemes are aimed at federalizing and militarizing state and local police. The U.S. Constitution, of course, does not authorize any such programs.

As usual, though, Obama tried to score political points exploiting a tragedy his administration helped create. “I know that many Americans have been deeply disturbed by the images we’ve seen in the heartland of our country as police have clashed with people protesting,” the president said Thursday from Edgartown, Massachusetts, where he is once again on vacation. The comments marked at least the [third time in recent years](#) that the president has inappropriately and very publicly sought to insert himself into local and state matters involving law enforcement and perceived racial issues.

While pointing out the obvious fact that there is no excuse for violence against police or exploiting tragedies for vandalism and looting, Obama reserved most of his unsought “advice” for local officials. “There’s also no excuse for police to use excessive force against peaceful protests or to throw protesters in jail for lawfully exercising their First Amendment rights,” he said. “And here in the United States of America, police should not be bullying or arresting journalists who are just trying to do their jobs and report to the American people on what they see on the ground.”

Of course, few Americans would disagree with those statements. Across the country, people from all over the political spectrum have reacted in horror at the scenes coming out of Ferguson — looting, rioting, lawlessness, and a massive police presence that looked more like an occupying military force on a Middle Eastern battlefield than friendly local cops keeping order and peace in an American suburb. However, there are several red flags in Obama’s comments that represent the height of hypocrisy.

For instance, Obama has relentlessly waged what countless analysts have described as a “[war on journalism](#).” Even top Obama apologists in the establishment media have expressed shock at the administration’s escalating assaults on the free press. From terrorizing sources and whistleblowers with



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threats of prosecution and prison for “espionage” to spying on reporters and labeling a journalist a “co-conspirator” in a case involving his reporting, countless experts have said the attacks on press freedom have reached unprecedented proportions under Obama.

Indeed, at about the same time Obama was pretending to be a defender of the free press from overzealous local cops — two reporters in Ferguson were arrested and released amid the turmoil — a massive coalition was gathering to demand an end to the administration’s war on journalism. According to media reports, representatives from the Freedom of the Press Foundation, Reporters Without Borders, the Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, the Government Accountability Project and the Committee to Protect Journalists all gathered at the National Press Club to call on Attorney General Eric Holder to quit terrorizing *New York Times* reporter James Risen for doing his job.

Another example of brazen hypocrisy stems from Obama’s statements about the police response. Among other comments, Obama announced that his scandal-plagued Justice Department would be investigating the actions of local law enforcement, both in the death of the unarmed man and the response to the unrest. “The Department of Justice is also consulting with local authorities about ways that they can maintain public safety without restricting the right of peaceful protest and while avoiding unnecessary escalation,” Obama claimed. “I made clear to the attorney general that we should do what is necessary to help determine exactly what happened and to see that justice is done.”

In his brief public statement, which also dealt with the [ongoing chaos in Iraq linked to Obama’s own plot to arm Syrian jihadists](#), the president said he had spoken with Democrat Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon. “I’m confident that working together, he’s going to be able to communicate his desire to make sure that justice is done and his desire to make sure that public safety is maintained in an appropriate way,” Obama said after having previously implied that police had not been acting in an “open and transparent” manner — another tragic irony coming from perhaps the most fanatically secretive administration in U.S. history.

But how did America end up with thousands of miniature armies as police departments armed with armored personnel carriers, tanks, grenade launchers, machine guns, battle helicopters, military costumes, and more — all doing the federal government’s bidding? The answer is simple: The federal government funded them, armed them, and now, in many respects, seeks to control them. And Obama has taken the programs to unprecedented new heights, handing out billions worth of “weapons of war” to local cops even while attacking the gun rights of Americans.

Consider that last year alone, the administration [handed out over 150 so-called “mine-resistant ambush-protected vehicles,”](#) or MRAPs, used by U.S. forces in Iraq, to local police departments within the “Homeland.” The Department of Homeland Security, meanwhile, has been at the [center of mounting controversy 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](#), as this magazine has documented extensively. While the federal programs militarizing and seeking to federalize local police forces have been around for decades, they are accelerating and expanding at a record pace under the current administration. Even [federal regulatory bureaucracies are getting SWAT teams](#).

All sides on the political spectrum have pointed to the same danger when it comes to showering local police with military hardware. Rutherford Institute President John Whitehead, an attorney whose non-



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profit focuses on protecting constitutionally guaranteed rights, explained that, “while recycling unused military equipment might sound thrifty and practical, the ramifications are proving to be far more dangerous and deadly.” He added: “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.”

In what could have been a warning about exactly what has happened this week in Ferguson, Whitehead also sounded the alarm about the dangerous consequences stemming from the militarizing of local police. “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,” he said. Ferguson illustrated that clearly.

The American Civil Liberties Union has expressed similar fears. Last year, ACLU Center for Justice Senior Counsel Kara Dansky warned: “One of our concerns with this is it has a tendency to escalate violence.” As could be seen with local cops dressed in battle fatigues while riding on armored trucks aiming military rifles and sound canons at protesters this week in Missouri, that tendency is becoming increasingly obvious and impossible to ignore.

At least some lawmakers in Congress have pointed out the facts, too. “The images and scenes we continue to see in Ferguson resemble war more than traditional police action,” explained Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) in an op-ed following the controversial developments, highlighting what he said was especially troublesome for blacks targeted by militarized policing.

“Not surprisingly, big government has been at the heart of the problem,” Paul explained. “Washington has incentivized the militarization of local police precincts by using federal dollars to help municipal governments build what are essentially small armies — where police departments compete to acquire military gear that goes far beyond what most of Americans think of as law enforcement.”

Unsurprisingly, law enforcement sources were not amused with Obama’s inappropriate meddling, either. “I would contend that discussing police tactics from Martha’s Vineyard is not helpful to ultimately calming the situation,” Executive Director Jim Pasco with the Fraternal Order of Police said in an interview with *The Hill*. “I think what he has to do as president and as a constitutional lawyer is remember that there is a process in the United States and the process is being followed, for good or for ill, by the police and by the county and by the city and by the prosecutors’ office.”

Perhaps the criticism of the heavy-handed and militarized police response is appropriate. However, if Obama was truly concerned, he would stop showering state and local authorities with military gear and federal “grants” aimed at further controlling and militarizing local police forces. Indeed, if the president really cared, he would quit trying to stoke racial tensions, too. And, instead of unconstitutionally meddling in state and local affairs, he would obey the Constitution.

Even the administration’s lawlessness and wild attitudes toward constitutional government are also spreading from the White House down to local police departments. Just last week, for instance, a New Jersey policeman [sparked a national firestorm](#) after claiming that, because Obama ignores the Constitution, local law enforcement is no longer required to respect it. “Obama has decimated the friggin’ Constitution,” the officer told a citizen. “So I don’t give a damn. Because if he doesn’t follow the Constitution, we don’t have to.”

At least one point is clear: Thanks largely to the feds, police departments across America, which are supposed to be accountable to local communities rather than Obama or the federal government, have become dangerously militarized. For decades, The John Birch Society, an affiliate of this magazine, has



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been running a campaign to “[Support Your Local Police and Keep Them Independent](#).” As the tragic events in Ferguson with federalized, battlefield-style policing illustrate clearly, American communities must take control of their local police departments — and keep them free from federal subsidies, militarization, and the accompanying federal control.

Photo of President Barack Obama: AP Images

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