Beyond Confrontation:
Community-Centered
Policing Tools

PolicyLink

Advancement Project

Turning Back the Tide: Promising Efforts to Demilitarize Police Departments

April 2015

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Foreword

On August 9, 2014, Michael Brown, an unarmed Black teenager, was shot multiple times and killed by Darren Wilson, a White police officer, in Ferguson, Missouri. This tragic act provoked grief and outrage in Ferguson and across the country. We mourned the loss of an innocent young man, taken before his time, and recognized that his killing was the latest in a long and rapidly growing succession of cases involving police use of lethal force against unarmed people of color.

The disproportionate, militarized police response to subsequent community protests in Ferguson—including the use of tear gas and snipers, curfews enforced by armored trucks and tactical units, and the unwarranted arrest of multiple journalists—further incensed the country and, in conjunction with Michael Brown's killing, raised an urgent question:

What must change so that **not one more** person of color is unjustifiably and indefensibly killed by the police?

While there are no definitive figures on how many Americans are shot by police every year, existing data point to grave differences by race. In 2014 alone, police were responsible for the deaths of 302 Black people across the country.From 2010 – 2012, Black men were 21 times more likely than their White peers to be killed by police.[1] Similar racial disparities hold true among those injured by police.[2]

From 2010–2012, Black men were 21 times more likely than White men to be killed by police.

Local law enforcement units too often treat low-income neighborhoods populated by people of color—communities where people strive to live, learn, work, play, and pray in peace and harmony—as if they are enemy territory. Youth of color who should be growing up in supportive, affirming environments are instead presumed to be criminals and relentlessly subjected to aggressive police tactics that result in unnecessary fear, arrests, injuries, and deaths. This approach prevents police from being seen as trusted community partners, undermining neighborhood safety when coordinated efforts are most needed.

The militarization of police departments further erodes the trust that should exist between residents and the police who serve them. The proliferation of machine guns, armored vehicles and aircraft, and camouflage in local law enforcement units does not help police-community relations, the future of our cities, or our country.

To move forward, the country must also acknowledge and counter the effects of systemic racial bias, which impairs the perceptions, judgment, and behavior of too many of our law enforcement personnel and obstructs the ability of our police departments and criminal justice institutions to protect and serve all communities in a fair and just manner.

In the aftermath of Michael Brown's death, PolicyLink, the Center for Global Policy Solutions, and over 1,400 social justice leaders, congressional members, faith leaders, artists, and activists signed an open letter to President Obama, urging federal action through the Justice Department to improve police-community relations through seven principles.

The Justice Department recently launched the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice, which aims to combat distrust and hostility between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

Soon after the letter was issued, the Justice Department launched the National Initiative for Building Community Trust and Justice. Funded with a three-year, $4.75 million federal grant, the initiative invests in training, evidence-based strategies, policy development, and research to combat distrust and hostility between law enforcement and the communities they serve. The initiative

brings together a consortium of national law enforcement experts, including the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, Yale Law School, the Center for Policing Equity at UCLA, and the Urban Institute.[3]

Several weeks later, the Department of Justice completed its investigation of the Ferguson Police Department, uncovering deep-seated injustice and racism in nearly every facet of the department's practices. Soon after the report's release, a Ferguson municipal judge and several Ferguson police officers—including Police Chief Thomas Jackson—resigned or were fired. At the same time, the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing released a robust report, complete with thoughtful and comprehensive recommendations and action steps to help overhaul policing practices in a way that benefits communities.

While these represent promising steps at the federal level to advance "community-centered policing," local efforts and leadership are also needed. The seven principles in the open letter to President Obama can guide actions by community leaders to help improve police-community relations and institute community-centered policing at the local level. They can help build mutual trust and respect, increase safety in communities, and minimize senseless killings and excessive use of force by police:

1. **Ensure Transparency and Accountability**: Police departments are funded by the public and should be accountable to the public. Therefore, police departments should not investigate themselves. Departments should establish enforceable, impartial accountability measures in instances where police brutality, racial profiling, and/or improper use of force are in question. This includes establishing effective and independent review boards broadly representative of the community, not just police interests. The actions, investigations, and publication of all relevant information, evidence, and policy recommendations of departments and review boards should be transparent and enforceable. Departments should also ensure that data and summary information are properly collected and made publicly available on particular incidents, progress, and trends that relate to suspected police brutality and racial profiling over the years for the department.

2. **Invest in Training:** Racial bias is real. Whether implicit or explicit, it influences perceptions and behaviors and can be deadly. Law enforcement personnel should be required to undergo racial bias training in addition to building skills that exemplify problem-solving strategies, conflict mediation techniques, and de-escalation tactics. Officers should become adept at being responsive to community needs and voices, and achieving consistency and continuity in engaging community while enforcing the law.

3. **Ensure Diversity:** Police department personnel should be representative of the communities they protect and serve. Therefore, police departments should adopt personnel practices that result in the hiring and retention of diverse law enforcement professionals who are culturally sensitive, speak the communities' languages, and are residents of their patrolled communities. Departments should implement and monitor diversity hiring and retention guidelines to further community trust and partnerships.

4. **Proactively Engage Communities:** Too often, law enforcement personnel hold stereotypes about Black and brown youth and vice versa. Lack of familiarity breeds lack of understanding and increases opportunities for conflict. Police departments should work to deconstruct stereotypes and bias by identifying regular opportunities for constructive and quality engagement with youth and others living in the communities

they serve. Departments should therefore partner with our communities in solving and preventing problems *before* they occur.

5. **Reject Militarization:** Police should not become an occupying force in our neighborhoods. Emergencies and terrorism are real concerns for our communities, but departments should not rely on military equipment and tactics to police everyday problems or peaceful protests. Departments and communities should reject the transfer of military equipment into local police departments.

6. **Examine and Implement Good Models:** It is possible to develop police departments that respect, serve, and protect all people in our communities regardless of age, race, physical and mental ability, gender, or class. Every department should partner with other local, state, and federal entities to quickly identify and establish new policies and practices to improve policing in communities.

7. **Implement Technology and Tools for Oversight:** Departments should implement technology that helps to investigate and hold officers accountable for misconduct, such as profiling due to a person's race, class, religion, gender, physical or mental ability, or sexual orientation. The technology should only be used when legitimately apprehending suspects with probable cause, and all information gathered by the use of technology should be made publicly accessible immediately.

In 2001, PolicyLink and Advancement Project released Community-Centered Policing: A Force for Change, a report intended to help advocates, policymakers, and police officials understand models addressing the myriad challenges facing police departments, police-community relations, and the advancement of community-centered policing practices. With the same goal, PolicyLink and Advancement Project have come together once more to lift up solutions, this time with a series of issue briefs that will update some of the examples and best practices originally presented and explore critical new issues in the following areas:

- Limiting Police Use of Force
- Engaging Communities as Partners
- Demilitarizing Local Police Departments
- Sustaining and Institutionalizing Best Practices and Strategies

The third brief, presented below, explores promising efforts to demilitarize police departments. We hope these new and updated briefs will be tools for community leaders to use in conversations with local police forces and policymakers that can shape new policies to help communities—including low-income communities and communities of color—become healthier, more vibrant, and safer for all to participate and prosper.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

A company of police officers in riot gear with raised automatic weapons advance upon a solitary Black man with his hands up—one of the most chilling and memorable images to come out of protests in Ferguson, Missouri, last fall. The world was shocked to see local police officers in full body armor, rolling down the streets of a small suburban town in armored trucks, throwing tear gas canisters and stun grenades into crowds of peaceful protestors.

When did our police begin to resemble an invading military force? When did protests in the United States start warranting a military-like response?

Ferguson was a wake-up call that hastened numerous civil liberties organizations to speak out against police militarization—state and local police departments across the country amassing huge arsenals of military weapons, aided by federal programs that transfer weapons used in Iraq and Afghanistan, or issue grants to purchase them.

The widespread militarization of policing—hostile, authoritarian, and too often, violent—represents the antithesis of community-centered policing and a marked transformation in the very nature of policing: Are police working to protect or control communities? Does a military response to non-violent protest increase community safety? Who are the police protecting when they use military equipment and tactics against communities?

The first two briefs in our *Beyond Confrontation* series advanced local programs and practices that exemplify police-community partnerships and agreements. Militarization, however, is a unique issue, fueled by an underregulated and overlooked federal policy that has flooded local communities with military weapons and equipment. *Turning Back the Tide: Promising Efforts to Demilitarize Police Departments*, the third brief in our series, explores the stark landscape of pervasive police militarization, and lifts up early examples of communities fighting to reverse the tide of militarization at the local level and restore a focus on community to local and state police departments.

Overview

Bomb suits, battering rams, helicopters, and surveillance and reconnaissance equipment—all commonly found on battlefields—are now available at local police departments across the country. Since 1990, under the Department of Defense's "1033 program," $5.1 billion of military equipment and weapons have been transferred to more than 8,000 police departments across the country.[4] Since 2002, the Department of Homeland Security has given out $35 billion in grants to state and local police departments, much of it to purchase military gear and armed personnel carriers.[5] Between 2009 and 2014 alone, the federal government provided $18 billion in funds and resources to state and local law enforcement agencies.[6]

A review by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) found that 63 agencies received more than 15,000 items of battle uniforms or personal protective equipment. Incredibly, 500 agencies received Mine Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) vehicles designed to withstand roadside bombs in Iraq and Afghanistan.[7] The Ohio State University Police Department justified the need to have an MRAP vehicle to provide protection at football games.[8] In Keene County, New Hampshire, police said they needed an armored personnel carrier because the annual pumpkin festival was a potential target for terrorists.[9]

Even schools are not immune. School districts in eight states have received AR-15 and M-16 semi-automatic rifles, and San Diego and Los Angeles school districts also received MRAP vehicles.[10] In the six California school districts that have semi-automatic weapons, the student bodies are predominately Latino.

"A mine-resistant vehicle isn't a thing that exists for our safety. It exists for our harm," said Laura Aguilar, a student leader in Los Angeles. "Why are we providing all these resources to the wrong side of education? A lot of us have already internalized it. It's the norm for students. We're being policed already in our communities, and now a second time in our schools."[11]

"A mine-resistant vehicle isn't a thing that exists for our safety. It exists for our harm." – Laura Aguilar, student leader, Los Angeles

Considering the kind of weapons being transferred, the regulations and restrictions are remarkably loose. The federal government does not monitor the agencies to make sure they use the weapons as outlined in their applications.[12] Local agencies only agree not to sell the weapons and to keep accurate inventories.[13] Presumably as a misguided way to prove need, the 1033 program absurdly requires the agencies to use the weapons within a year, creating an incentive for military-style action.[14]

Further, oversight of distributed weapons has been lax. An investigation found that 184 state and local police departments have been suspended from the 1033 program because of missing weapons, leading some critics to question whether the weapons were lost or stolen and sold on the black market.[15] Far from being regulated, weapons can be transferred from one agency to another with no restrictions.[16]

Local agencies' acquisition of military weapons also reinforces concerns about the "military-industrial complex" first warned of by President Eisenhower. The *Los Angeles Times* reported that an entire industry is emerging to produce military equipment for local police agencies, predicting it would grow to $31 billion by this year.[17] Rather than exclusively recycling weapons manufactured for use in Iraq and Afghanistan, the 1033 program has been used to bolster the local weapons manufacturing industry—the ACLU found that 36 percent of the equipment sent to local agencies through the program was newly purchased from manufacturers.[18]

Militarization through SWAT Teams

The militarization of local policing has roots in the use of SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) teams to serve search warrants. SWAT raids—often for small amounts of drugs—are not announced as police actions. This intentional lack of transparency can lead to inhabitants, thinking they are under attack, responding in self-defense with weapons, increasing the incidence of and potential for injury and death.

The number of SWAT teams has grown nationwide, ostensibly to address the war on drugs and the war on terror. In the 1970s, there were a few hundred SWAT raids a year; in the early '80s, there were 3,000 a year, and in 2005, 50,000 a year (136 a day). Thirteen percent of small towns with a population of 25,000 to 50,000 had SWAT teams in 1983; in 2005, 80 percent had them.[19]

Communities of color are disproportionately targeted by SWAT raids. According to an ACLU review, 42 percent of the people targeted by the SWAT raids were African American, and 12 percent were Latino. In 16 departments examined by the ACLU, African Americans were between 4 to 47 times more likely to be impacted by SWAT activities than Whites.

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Although SWAT teams were initially introduced to handle extreme situations, they are now most commonly deployed for raids on private residences. According to the ACLU, 79 percent of SWAT deployments, "were for the purpose of executing a search warrant, most commonly in drug investigations," and only 7 percent of deployments "were for hostage, barricade, or active shooter scenarios."[20] This invariably increases the likelihood of violence against non-violent suspects and non-suspect members of households.

Police departments are not required to report SWAT and other paramilitary activities. Only 131 of 255 law enforcement agencies responded to an ACLU public records request for information about SWAT activities, claiming that the information would reveal trade secrets or it was too costly to collect it. None of the responding agencies provided all requested data, such as information about those targeted, why a SWAT raid was deemed necessary, and/or the results of SWAT actions.[21]

Because there are no reliable data collected and available about SWAT activities, it is hard to capture a complete nature and intensity of impact. However, the use of SWAT teams has had deadly and devastating consequences: a 19-month-old baby in Wisconsin was severely burned when police threw a flash bang grenade into his crib. A 26-year-old mother in Ohio, holding her 14-month old son, was killed when SWAT officers broke down her door and started firing. A 26-year-old Iraq veteran, investigating noises at the front door with a rifle that had the safety on, was shot 22 times by SWAT officers in Arizona and died without receiving medical attention.[22]

Need for Community-Centered Training

Recruiting and training materials across the country show officers engaged in paramilitary activities, viewing the communities they are supposed to be protecting and serving as enemy combatants.[23] Officers are often taught to develop a "warrior" mentality and "battlemind" ready for combat.[24]

For example, in December 2014, the Justice Department issued a report criticizing the Cleveland Police Department for a pattern of "unreasonable and unnecessary force." The report said police too often viewed themselves as an occupying force, as evidenced by a large banner at a district police station that called it an "operating base"—a military term for a secured outpost supporting tactical operations in a war zone.[25]

Some military experts have criticized the military actions of local police departments, pointing to the lack of adequate training for the equipment and tactics. Lt. General Russel Honore, the officer who ordered his soldiers in post-Katrina New Orleans to put their "weapons down, damn it," commented on the police response to protests in Ferguson: "Anytime we have policemen pointing weapons at American citizens, they need to go through re-training."[26] Furthermore, federal agencies supplying equipment and grants do not train local police agencies in the use of military weapons or tactics, according to testimony at a hearing on arming police departments before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs.[27]

"Anytime we have policemen pointing weapons at American citizens, they need to go through re-training."
– Lt. General Russel Honore

The use of stress-based training for police officers—based on the military boot camp model—versus non-stress training (a more academic style) has been debated for decades. Particularly in light of the move toward community policing, some are questioning the stress-based model. "... The majority of police recruits receive their training in academies with a stress-based military orientation," wrote Karl Bickel, senior policy analyst for the Department of Justice's Community Oriented Policing Services. "This begs the question; is this military model—designed to prepare young recruits for combat—the appropriate mechanism for teaching our police trainees how to garner community trust and partner with citizens to solve crime and public order problems? ...The warrior-like orientation seems antithetical to a community oriented policing philosophy that is grounded in trust building, partnering, and developing and sustaining positive relationships with citizen stakeholders that are integral parts of community oriented policing."[28]

In the midst of this seemingly unchecked militarization of police departments, efforts are emerging to stem the tide.

This brief, the third in the *Beyond Confrontation* series, highlights the following promising efforts to demilitarize police departments:

- Federal Action to Demilitarize Police Departments
- Community Action to Return 1033-Sourced Weapons and Equipment
- Transforming Police Culture and Training

Promising Efforts to Demilitarize Police Departments

Federal Action to Demilitarize Police Departments

Largely as a result of the public shock and backlash against heavily militarized police actions in Ferguson, Missouri, the White House has been exploring reforms to the 1033 program. In January 2015, President Obama created a working group to examine the 1033 program and recommend reforms regarding equipment training, limitations on types of equipment, and standardizing procedures. The working group will have 120 days for its review, and it will be led by the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Attorney General—other members include the Secretaries of the Treasury, Interior, and Education, and the head of the Office of National Drug Policy.[29]

In December 2014, the Executive Office of the President released *White House Review: Federal Support for Local Law Enforcement Equipment Acquisition*, which provided details on the programs that supported local law enforcement acquisition of equipment from the federal government. In its review, the White House explored whether equipment was appropriate to the needs of communities, whether law enforcement agencies had adequate policies to guide use of the equipment, whether personnel were properly trained and certified to employ equipment they obtain, and whether law enforcement had organizational and operational practices and standards to prevent misuse/abuse of the equipment.

The report found a lack of consistency in how federal programs are structured, implemented, and audited, and identified four focus areas to maximize the safety and security of police officers and the communities they serve: 1) local community engagement; 2) federal coordination and oversight; 3) training requirements; and 4) the community policing model.[30]

In November 2014, the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services issued a new guide to local law enforcement agencies that provided information, tools, and best practices to protect public safety and the right to protest.

The week after Officer Darren Wilson shot and killed Michael Brown in August 2014, Representative Hank Johnson (D-Georgia) introduced the Stop Militarizing Law Enforcement Act of 2014 (HR 5478) that would restrict the kinds of equipment transferred under the 1033 program, require detailed accounting of the equipment, and end the statutory requirement that the agencies use the equipment. As of January 2015, the Congressional Black Caucus is planning to offer the bill into the new Congress, as part of a package of Ferguson-related legislation.[31]

Community Action to Return 1033-Sourced Weapons and Equipment

Communities across the country have successfully pressed for the return of weapons obtained through the 1033 program. For example, after residents in San Jose, California, expressed

concerns, the San Jose Police Department announced the return of the MRAP vehicle it had obtained through the 1033 program. "We want the community's trust," said department spokeswoman Sgt. Heather Randol.[32] The department also called two community meetings to discuss the acquisition of a drone, after residents questioned the lack of public debate or notice prior to its purchase. Davis, California, also returned a MRAP vehicle after community representatives objected to the militarization of the department.[33]

Local government representatives have also intervened to prevent or regulate acquisition of military equipment. In Neenah, Wisconsin, a member of the city council is backing an ordinance that would require a council vote to approve 1033 transfers. In Oxford County, Maine, county commissioners rescinded approval of the sheriff department's request for an MRAP vehicle.[34] When Berkeley, California, city officials learned of a pending application for an Armored Emergency Rescue Vehicle, they canceled it. [35]

School districts have also successfully returned equipment. The Community Rights Campaign protested the Los Angeles Unified School District's acquisition of military equipment, leading to the return of three grenade launchers and transfer of an MRAP vehicle to the Barstow Police Department. As a practical consideration, the police chief noted that the cost of maintenance for the MRAP vehicle and of certifying a driver made it not "viable" for the department. Also in response to the Community Rights Campaign, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) agreed to provide an inventory of the military weapons it acquired. In Texas, where school districts have also received military weapons, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and Texas Appleseed, a social justice organization, have requested the termination of 1033 transfers to school districts.[36]

Accountability created through reporting requirements can work to ensure procedural justice and to improve community relations with local and state law enforcement agencies through greater transparency. Local communities have also advocated for state oversight of federal programs supplying weapons to local departments, including uniform reporting of paramilitary actions and establishment of protocols for search warrants and crowd control. For example, after the mayor of a small town in Maryland and his family were held at gunpoint in a SWAT raid for two hours, he successfully led a push to change state law to require regular reporting on the use of SWAT teams.[37] Utah has also enacted legislation requiring state law enforcement agencies to compile and report data on SWAT activities.[38] Similar legislation has been introduced in Michigan with the goal of increasing public safety.[39]

Urban Shield—a multiday trade show and training exercise that attracted 200 law enforcement agencies to the city of Oakland, California—was sponsored by major weapons manufacturing companies. A broad coalition of more than 15 organizations joined forces to oppose Urban Shield and organized the "No To Urban Shield Day of Action" in October 2013. In September 2014, Mayor Jean Quan announced the city would not pursue another contract with Urban Shield.

Transforming Police Culture and Training

While the return of weapons and proper oversight are steps in the right direction, Peter Kraska, an expert in the militarization of police forces, has noted that a public examination of police tactics and increasingly militarized police culture would result in more substantive reforms than simply giving back the weapons. Reversing the militarization of police culture promises to be more challenging than the return of sniper rifles and MRAP vehicles, however. The culture exists on multiple levels, from recruitment to training to equipment.

The Los Angeles Police Department underwent a review of and a change in its training practices, moving from a repressive policing model to one that engages and works with the community. Luann Pannell, director of police training and education, called the new model a hybrid of stress-based and academic training—one that advises officers to think of the people they are serving and

to clearly communicate and review their actions. In the past, recruits sat in rows, at attention all day. Now they sit at tables and learn as a team, solving problems collectively.

LAPD realized it has the same goal as the community—safe streets. "Communities are the greatest preventive factor," Pannell said. This includes consideration of whether officers effectively used community resources, such as mental health agencies. The department also looked at best practices from northwestern states and Canada to develop cross-cultural education and training with an emphasis on diversity. It began to train officers to be critical thinkers, problem solvers, and community builders, including training in public speaking and communication.[40]

Local police departments could actually benefit from military training in crowd control. According to Jason Fritz, who served three deployments to Iraq, local police need to adopt military principles for crowd control, which include having respect for the crowd, establishing a dialogue with protest leaders, responding with the least amount of force necessary if the crowd turns violent, recording everything in the interest of everyone's accountability, and not treating the media as the enemy.[41]

Military principles for crowd control include having respect for the crowd, establishing a dialogue with protest leaders, responding with the least amount of force necessary if the crowd turns violent, recording everything in the interest of everyone's accountability, and not treating the media as the enemy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This brief outlined the scope of the pervasive militarization of local police departments and lifted up examples of communities that have worked to reverse the tide. It will take dedicated effort from community leaders, elected officials, and advocates across the country to build and expand upon these efforts. The following recommendations can be used as guidelines for comprehensive action:

- The Department of Defense should eliminate the 1033 program, especially transfers to school districts and school district police.
- At a minimum, the White House should regulate the program, including:
  - —implement standardized training and oversight over how weapons and equipment are used;
  - —track transfer from one agency to another and missing items;
  - —limit use of weaponry to actual terrorist activities or hostage situations;
  - —change requirement that weapons and equipment must be used within one year as that encourages unnecessary use; and
  - —limit the number and kinds of weapons and equipment that are sent to local and state police departments.
- The Department of Justice should require state and local governments to institute regular and standardized reporting of SWAT and paramilitary actions with detailed information about purpose, targets, and results.
- Local governments should establish a requirement to approve the acquisition of military weapons and equipment after public hearings and discussion.
- Local leaders should press for the return of military weapons and equipment.
- Local governments should establish a protocol and standardized, regular reporting for the use of SWAT actions.
- Local governments should require police departments to obtain approval for non-emergency SWAT actions.
- Police departments should require SWAT team members to wear body cameras.
- Police departments should establish a protocol for crowd control that ensures the rights of protestors as well as public safety.
- Police departments should reconsider recruiting and training materials and practices based solely on stress-based models, shifting to recruitment and training based on community-centered policing.
- School district police agencies should return all military equipment and weapons.

Acknowledgments

PolicyLink and Advancement Project are grateful to the following experts for their input and guidance in the development of this brief:

- Chief of Police Dean Esserman, New Haven Police Department, Connecticut
- Professor Peter Kraska, Eastern Kentucky University School of Justice Studies
- David Muhammad, National Council on Crime and Delinquency
- Luann Pannell, Los Angeles Police Department

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