

Obama, Master of Diversion, Proposes Bogus Reforms of Militarized Police

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President Obama's "ban" on certain military hardware and gear is both fraudulent and a diversion from the real issue: the oppressive mission of the police in Black America. The cops who killed Michael Brown and Freddie Gray and countless others "weren't wearing battlefield outfits, firing automatic rifles, or riding around in tanks. They murder quite efficiently with handguns, batons and their hands and feet, as cops always have done."

President Obama took his police "reform" shell game to Camden, New Jersey, this week, announcing a ban on the sale of some types of [military equipment](#) to local police departments, and restrictions on other weapons, gear and equipment. As with all of the administration's responses to the nine-month-old Black Lives Matter movement, it was an exercise in public relations and calculated diversion, crafted to camouflage the essential nature of the Mass Black Incarceration State - what Michelle Alexander calls the New Jim Crow.

Obama is the true Mad Man, an impresario of "impressions." He told a crowd at a Salvation Army center in Camden, "We've seen how militarized gear can sometimes give people a feeling like there's an occupying force, as opposed to a force that's part of the community that's protecting them and serving them." To soothe such "feelings" in Black communities, Obama claimed his executive order would halt the use of federal funds to purchase tracked armored vehicles, the highest-caliber guns and ammo, bayonets, grenade launchers and camouflage uniforms, and put controls on wheeled armor vehicles, certain kinds of explosives and flares, manned aircraft, drones, battering rams and riot gear - and, of course, require more training for police officers in the use of such ordnance and equipment. Presumably, communities that have been under siege by police for generations will now feel much better.

The bans and restrictions are actually bogus, deliberately misleading, or redundant, as will be explained, below. But, that's a secondary matter. Obama's impressions-creating "feelings" offensive does not address the core demand of the Black Lives Matter movement: that police stop killing, maiming, mass imprisoning, humiliating and terrorizing Black communities - in other words, an end to the armed occupation of Black America.

Armies of occupation may yearn for tracked vehicles, high-caliber weapons and battlefield military gear, but such hardware is not essential to the occupation mission - which is precisely why Obama and many police chiefs favor a softening of the police profile. The cops who killed Michael Brown, Eric Garner, Tamir Rice, Freddie Gray, Walter Scott and, literally, countless other Black men, women and children over the years, weren't wearing battlefield outfits, firing automatic rifles, or riding around in tanks. They murder quite efficiently with

handguns, batons and their hands and feet, as cops always have done.

It is the MISSION of the police that is lethal, racist, oppressive and unacceptable to Black America; the equipment and clothing is incidental. The Black Panther Party for Self Defense correctly identified the police mission as that of an army of occupation back in 1966 – three years before the first SWAT team was established in Los Angeles, in 1969. The huge federal role in funding and equipping local police began with creation of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) through legislation passed in 1968. But, the feds did not set the local police on their mission of armed occupation; they simply funded, armored, wired and enhanced that pre-existing mission, so that today, there are 80,000 SWAT operations every year. The mission – the armed occupation – pre-dates SWAT, police tanks, high-velocity weapons and camouflage uniforms.

Black Lives Matter organizers have never put changes in police equipment at the top of their demands. How many demonstrators wave placards demanding “Take Off the Riot Gear, Officer,” or “Your Bullets are Too Big, Mr. Policeman, Why Don’t You Scale it Down, Buddy”? No. The signs read: “Stop Killing Us,” “Jail Killer Cops,” or simply, “Cops Out of Our Community” – none of which is under consideration by Obama and his [21st Century Policing Task Force](#).

Obama’s problem, as he sees it, is that the police now *look like* what they actually are, and have been, for generations: an army of occupation. His solution is sartorial: to put them back in soft uniforms *most of the time*, and to hide the heavy hardware. But the Storm Trooper capability and training will remain, and even increase. Charles Ramsey, the Philadelphia police commissioner and chairman of the president’s Policing Task Force, [went on PBS television](#) to clarify Obama’s announced scale-back. The lower profile is necessary because:

“We don’t want to incite a crowd. So I think it’s the way in which you deploy, depending on what it is you’re responding to and what you’re dealing with. People have a right to protest, and if you show up with riot gear, and heavy armored vehicles and so forth when people are just simply out peacefully demonstrating, you’re going to get exactly that. You’re going to wind up with a riot, more than likely.”

However, the big guns and vehicles in the warehouse become operative as soon as a public safety emergency of some kind is declared. As he told PBS’s Judy Woodruff, “we’re not talking about all-out riots like we saw the first day in Baltimore, when things really spiraled out of control, and even later in Ferguson, when things spiraled out of control, but when it first started.”

Thus, the nature of the beast – a racist counter-insurgency force poised to lock down the ghetto – remains unchanged.

It turns out that almost all of Obama’s new “bans” and “restrictions” were already official policy, in some cases for decades. According to the [Washington Examiner](#), the only new item on Obama’s banned list is the bayonet. The Pentagon reportedly barred transfer of grenade launchers and .50 caliber ammunition to local cops in 1999, and outlawed giving police tracked vehicles in 2011. Camouflage uniforms have been a no-no since 2008. The 625 MRAP armored vehicles and 5,200 Humvees sent to local police since the 1990s have

already passed through a “control” mechanism that Pentagon officials say is very much like what Obama is now proposing.

To sum up, President Obama’s attempt to focus public attention on police hardware, rather than the oppressive mission of the Black Mass Incarceration State, is both a diversion and a fraud. It is not a meaningful or honest response to the core demands of the Black Lives Matter movement, but instead seeks to change the subject to calibers of weapons, styles of police dress, and distinctions between tracked and wheeled armored vehicles. At the end of the exercise, both the equipment and the racist police mission remain in place.

The logic, and the real momentum, of the movement is towards Black community control of police, a demand that will become non-negotiable on both sides – until a point of crisis is reached and the issue must be addressed.

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The Black Is Back Coalition is circulating model petitions for Black community control of police, [on its website](#).

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