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The wrong way to restore peace in Ferguson

The National Guard is better trained to use the big guns in Missouri

By [THE WASHINGTON TIMES](#) - - Monday, August 18, 2014

Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon, a Democrat, called out the National Guard on Monday to restore order to the streets of Ferguson. Heavily armed soldiers will take the place of even more heavily armed police officers who had been assigned to prevent looting as the mobs gathered to riot.

The investigation of the Aug. 9 police shooting of Michael Brown shows that maybe the police did not, after all, coldly shoot an innocent man in the back. The evidence shows the officer faced a man who had just committed a strong-arm robbery of a convenience store. It's plausible that young Brown, a 6'4", 292-pound 18-year-old was not happy when the local constabulary told him to get out of the middle of the street.

Residents in the St. Louis suburbs didn't believe the initial police account because many of them have had experiences with cops that were not happy ones. The area is riddled with speed-trap towns that collect half of their general revenue from traffic tickets. Instead of friendly lawmen, they see revenue agents with attitude and big guns. Police weaponry is increasingly powerful.

Ferguson's finest paraded their Pentagon hardware with pride, like a kid with his first car, not understanding that such a display of force is wholly inappropriate on American streets. The generals would cashier a commander who allowed his troops in Iraq to point machine guns and sniper rifles at civilians like an occupying army.

The militarization of the police has so reached the point of absurdity that three years ago the Department of Education led an assault on a mobile home in Stockton, Calif., to arrest a nonviolent, white-collar man who used faked student-loan applications to pocket taxpayer cash. Kids aged 3, 7 and 11 were sound asleep at 6 a.m. when a SWAT team broke down the door. Agents threw the father to the floor in his underwear, and his terrified children were locked in the back seat of an unheated patrol car for more than two hours while the cops went through the mobile home, apparently to look for guilty ballpoint pens.

There was no need for riot gear to apprehend a student-loan cheat, and certainly no excuse for harassing small children. Had this particular suspect locked his kids in a car to drop into a supermarket for a bottle of milk, he would have been arrested and prosecuted for child abuse. Common sense goes over the hill when policemen play soldier.

We don't know that what happened in St. Louis County was the result of arming a SWAT team with enough military hardware to subdue Lower Volta. This transfer of so much military hardware has transformed police thinking. Unidentifiable armed men in military uniforms carrying fully automatic weapons and riding in armed personnel carriers no longer see themselves as keepers of the peace. They're eager to find some action resembling Omaha Beach.

Fully 80 percent of towns and cities with a population of 25,000 or more have their own SWAT teams, many with small likelihood of encountering SWAT-like "situations." Many snapped up armored vehicles, machine guns and body armor left over from the Iraq war. When these police teams are deployed in full battle regalia, they make up a dangerous and truly scary force.

No one wants to put the men and women who serve in law enforcement at greater risk than necessary. Nearly all of them do their best to do a difficult and often dangerous job, but no community should feel comfortable with a police force that seems to be morphing from a public safety force to an occupying army before a citizen's very eyes.