

Jackboots in the Morning: No One Is Spared from This American Nightmare

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[Source](#)

[“This is jackboots in the morning. This is an American nightmare that they would arrest somebody like this.”](#)—Judge Andrew Napolitano

The American Police State does not discriminate. Whatever dangerous practices you allow the government to carry out now—whether it’s in the name of national security or protecting America’s borders or making America great again—rest assured, these same practices can and will be used against you when the government decides to set its sights on you.

We’ve been having this same debate about the perils of government overreach for the past 50-plus years, and still we don’t seem to learn, or if we learn, we learn too late.

For too long now, the American people have allowed their personal prejudices and politics to cloud their judgment and render them incapable of seeing that the treatment being doled out by the government’s lethal enforcers has remained consistent, no matter the threat.

All of the excessive, abusive tactics employed by the government today—warrantless surveillance, stop and frisk searches, SWAT team raids, roadside strip searches, asset

forfeiture schemes, private prisons, indefinite detention, militarized police, etc.–will eventually be meted out on the general populace.

At that point, when you find yourself in the government's crosshairs, it will not matter whether your skin is black or yellow or brown or white; it will not matter whether you're an immigrant or a citizen; it will not matter whether you're rich or poor; it will not matter whether you're Republican or Democrat; and it certainly won't matter who you voted for in the last presidential election.

At that point—at the point you find yourself subjected to dehumanizing, demoralizing, thuggish behavior by government bureaucrats who are hyped up on the power of their badges and empowered to detain, search, interrogate, threaten and generally harass anyone they see fit—remember you were warned.

Take [Roger Stone](#), one of President Trump's longtime supporters, for example.

This is a guy accused of witness tampering, obstruction of justice and lying to Congress.

As far as we know, this guy is not the kingpin of a violent mob or drug-laundering scheme. He's been charged with a political crime. So what does the FBI do? They send [29 heavily armed agents in 17 vehicles to carry out a SWAT-style raid](#) on Stone's Florida home just before dawn on Jan. 25, 2019.

As the *Boston Herald* [reports](#):

“After his arraignment on witness tampering, obstruction and lying to Congress, a rattled Stone was quoted as saying [29 agents ‘pounded on the door,’ pointed automatic weapons at him and ‘terrorized’ his wife and dogs](#). Stone was taken away in handcuffs, the sixth associate of President Trump to be indicted in Special Counsel Robert Mueller's probe into Russian meddling in the 2016 election. All the charges have

been related to either lying or tax evasion, with no evidence of so-called 'collusion' with Russia emerging to date."

Overkill? Sure.

Yet another example of government overreach and brutality? Definitely.

But here's the thing: while Tucker Carlson and Chris Christie and other Trump apologists appear shocked that law enforcement personnel would stage a military assault against "[an unarmed 66-year-old man who has been charged with a nonviolent crime](#)," this is nothing new.

Indeed, this is blowback, one more vivid example of how the government's short-sighted use of immoral, illegal and unconstitutional tactics become dangerous weapons turned against the American people.

To be clear, this Stone raid is far from the first time a SWAT team has been employed in non-violent scenarios.

Nationwide, SWAT teams routinely invade homes, break down doors, kill family pets ([they always shoot the dogs first](#)), damage furnishings, terrorize families, and wound or kill those unlucky enough to be present during a raid.

Payton, a 7-year-old black Labrador retriever, and 4-year-old Chase, also a black Lab, were shot and killed after a [SWAT team mistakenly raided the mayor's home](#) while searching for drugs. Police shot Payton four times. [Chase was shot twice](#), once from behind as he ran away. "My government blew through my doors and killed my dogs. They thought we were drug dealers, and we were treated as such. I don't think they really ever considered that we weren't," [recalls](#) Mayor Cheye Calvo, who described being handcuffed and interrogated for hours—wearing only underwear and socks—surrounded by the dogs' carcasses and pools of the dogs' blood.

SWAT teams have been employed to address an astonishingly trivial array of so-called criminal activity or mere community nuisances: angry dogs, [domestic disputes](#), [improper paperwork filed by an orchid farmer](#), and [misdemeanor marijuana possession](#), to give a brief sampling. In some instances, SWAT teams are even employed, in full armament, to perform [routine patrols](#).

If these raids are becoming increasingly common and widespread, you can chalk it up to the “make-work” philosophy, in which you assign at-times unnecessary jobs to individuals to keep them busy or employed. In this case, however, the make-work principle is being used to justify the use of sophisticated military equipment and, in the process, qualify for federal funding.

SWAT teams originated as specialized units dedicated to defusing extremely sensitive, dangerous situations. They were never meant to be used for routine police work such as serving a warrant.

Frequently justified as vital tools necessary to combat terrorism and deal with rare but extremely dangerous criminal situations, such as those involving hostages, SWAT teams—which first appeared on the scene in California in the 1960s—have now become intrinsic parts of federal and local law enforcement operations, thanks in large part to substantial federal assistance and the Pentagon’s 1033 military surplus recycling program, which allows the transfer of military equipment, weapons and training to local police for free or at sharp discounts.

Mind you, this is the same program that President Trump [breathed new life into back in 2017](#).

As the role of paramilitary forces has expanded to include involvement in nondescript police work targeting *nonviolent* suspects, the mere presence of SWAT units has actually

injected a level of danger and violence into police-citizen interactions that was not present as long as these interactions were handled by traditional civilian officers.

There are [few communities without a SWAT team](#) today.

In 1980, there were roughly 3,000 SWAT team-style raids in the US.

Incredibly, that number has since grown to [more than 80,000 SWAT team raids per year](#).

Where this becomes a problem of life and death for Americans is when these militarized SWAT teams are assigned to carry out routine law enforcement tasks.

No longer reserved exclusively for deadly situations, SWAT teams are now increasingly being deployed for relatively routine police matters such as serving a search warrant, with some SWAT teams being sent out as much as five times a day.

In the state of Maryland alone, [92 percent of 8200 SWAT missions were used to execute search or arrest warrants](#).

Police in both Baltimore and Dallas have used [SWAT teams to bust up poker games](#).

A Connecticut SWAT team [swarmed a bar](#) suspected of serving alcohol to underage individuals.

In Arizona, a [SWAT team was used to break up an alleged cockfighting ring](#).

An Atlanta [SWAT team raided a music studio](#), allegedly out of a concern that it might have been involved in illegal music piracy.

A Minnesota SWAT team raided the wrong house in the middle of the night, handcuffed the three young children, held the mother on the floor at gunpoint, shot the family dog, and then

“forced the handcuffed children to sit next to the carcass of their dead pet and bloody pet for more than an hour” while they searched the home.

A California SWAT team drove an armored Lenco Bearcat into Roger Serrato’s yard, surrounded his home with paramilitary troops wearing face masks, threw a fire-starting flashbang grenade into the house in order, then when Serrato appeared at a window, unarmed and wearing only his shorts, held him at bay with rifles. Serrato died of asphyxiation from being trapped in the flame-filled house. Incredibly, the father of four had done nothing wrong. The SWAT team had misidentified him as someone involved in a shooting.

And then there was the police officer who tripped and “accidentally” shot and killed Eurie Stamps, an unarmed grandfather of 12, who had been forced to lie facedown on the floor of his home at gunpoint while a SWAT team attempted to execute a search warrant against his stepson.

Equally outrageous was the four-hour SWAT team raid on a California high school, where students were locked down in classrooms, forced to urinate in overturned desks and generally terrorized by heavily armed, masked gunmen searching for possible weapons that were never found.

These incidents are just the tip of the iceberg.

What we are witnessing is an inversion of the police-civilian relationship.

Rather than compelling police officers to remain within constitutional bounds as servants of the people, ordinary Americans are being placed at the mercy of militarized police units.

This is what happens when paramilitary forces are used to conduct ordinary policing operations, such as executing warrants on nonviolent defendants.

Unfortunately, general incompetence, collateral damage (fatalities, property damage, etc.) and botched raids tend to go hand in hand with an overuse of paramilitary forces.

In some cases, officers misread the address on the warrant.

In others, they simply barge into the wrong house or even the wrong building.

In another subset of cases (such as the Department of Education raid on [Anthony Wright](#)'s home), police conduct a search of a building where the suspect no longer resides.

If you're wondering why the Education Department needs a SWAT team, you're not alone.

Among those federal agencies laying claim to their own law enforcement divisions are the State Department, [Department of Education](#), Department of Energy, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the National Park Service, [to name just a few](#). In fact, it says something about our reliance on the military that federal agencies having nothing whatsoever to do with national defense now see the need for their own paramilitary units.

SWAT teams have even on occasion conducted multiple, sequential raids on wrong addresses or executed search warrants despite the fact that the suspect is already in police custody. Police have also raided homes on the basis of mistaking the presence or scent of legal substances for drugs. Incredibly, these substances have included tomatoes, sunflowers, fish, elderberry bushes, kenaf plants, hibiscus, and ragweed.

As you can see, all too often, botched SWAT team raids have resulted in one tragedy after another for the residents with little consequences for law enforcement.

Unfortunately, judges tend to afford extreme levels of

deference to police officers who have mistakenly killed innocent civilians but do not afford similar leniency to civilians who have injured police officers in acts of self-defense.

Even homeowners who mistake officers for robbers can be sentenced for assault or murder if they take defensive actions resulting in harm to police.

And as journalist [Radley Balko shows in his in-depth study of police militarization](#), the shock-and-awe tactics utilized by many SWAT teams only increases the likelihood that someone will get hurt.

Drug warrants, for instance, are typically served by paramilitary units late at night or shortly before dawn. Unfortunately, to the unsuspecting homeowner—especially in cases involving mistaken identities or wrong addresses—a raid can appear to be nothing less than a violent home invasion, with armed intruders crashing through their door. The natural reaction would be to engage in self-defense. Yet such a defensive reaction on the part of a homeowner, particularly a gun owner, will spur officers to employ lethal force.

That's exactly what happened to [Jose Guerena](#), the young ex-Marine who was killed after a SWAT team kicked open the door of his Arizona home during a drug raid and opened fire. According to news reports, Guerena, 26 years old and the father of two young children, grabbed a gun in response to the forced invasion but never fired. In fact, the safety was still on his gun when he was killed. Police officers were not as restrained. The young Iraqi war veteran was allegedly fired upon 71 times. Guerena had no prior criminal record, and the police found nothing illegal in his home.

[Aiyana Jones is](#) dead because of a SWAT raid gone awry. The 7-year-old was killed after a Detroit SWAT team—searching for a suspect—launched a flash-bang grenade into her family's

apartment, broke through the door and opened fire, hitting the little girl who was asleep on the living room couch. The cops weren't even in the right apartment.

Exhibiting a similar lack of basic concern for public safety, a Georgia SWAT team launched a flash-bang grenade into the house in which Baby Bou Bou, his three sisters and his parents were staying. The [grenade landed in the 2-year-old's crib](#), burning a hole in his chest and leaving him with scarring that a lifetime of surgeries will not be able to easily undo.

[Alberto Sepulveda, 11, died from one "accidental" shotgun round to the back](#) after a SWAT team raided his parents' home.

The problems inherent in these situations are further compounded by the fact that SWAT teams are granted "no-knock" warrants at high rates such that the warrants themselves are rendered practically meaningless.

This sorry state of affairs is made even worse by U.S. Supreme Court rulings that have essentially [done away with the need for a "no-knock" warrant altogether](#), giving the police authority to disregard the protections afforded American citizens by the Fourth Amendment.

In the process, Americans are rendered altogether helpless and terror-stricken as a result of these confrontations with the police.

Indeed, "terrorizing" is a mild term to describe the effect on those who survive such vigilante tactics. "It was terrible. It was the most frightening experience of my life. I thought it was a terrorist attack," said 84-year-old Leona Goldberg, a victim of such a raid.

Yet this type of "terrorizing" activity is characteristic of the culture that we have created.

If ever there were a time to de-militarize and de-weaponize

local police forces, it's now.

While we are now grappling with a power-hungry police state at the federal level, the militarization of domestic American law enforcement is largely the result of the militarization of local police forces, which are increasingly militaristic in their uniforms, weaponry, language, training, and tactics and have come to rely on SWAT teams in matters that once could have been satisfactorily performed by traditional civilian officers.

Yet American police forces were never supposed to be a branch of the military, nor were they meant to be private security forces for the reigning political faction.

Instead, they were intended to be an aggregation of countless local police units, composed of citizens like you and me that exist for a sole purpose: to serve and protect the citizens of each and every American community.

As a result of the increasing militarization of the police in recent years, however, the police now not only look like the military—with their foreboding uniforms and phalanx of lethal weapons—but they function like them, as well.

Thus, no more do we have a civilian force of peace officers entrusted with serving and protecting the American people. Instead, today's militarized law enforcement officials have shifted their allegiance from the citizenry to the state, acting preemptively to ward off any possible challenges to the government's power, unrestrained by the boundaries of the Fourth Amendment.

As journalist Herman Schwartz observed, "The Fourth Amendment was designed to stand between us and arbitrary governmental authority. For all practical purposes, that [shield has been shattered](#), leaving our liberty and personal integrity subject to the whim of every cop on the beat, trooper on the highway and jail official."

Heavily armed police officers, the end product of the government—federal, local and state—and law enforcement agencies having merged, have become a “standing” or permanent army, composed of full-time professional soldiers who do not disband.

Yet these permanent armies are exactly what those who drafted the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights feared as tools used by despotic governments to wage war against its citizens.

This phenomenon we are experiencing with the police is what philosopher Abraham Kaplan referred to as the law of the instrument, which essentially says that to a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

In the scenario that has been playing out in recent years, we the citizenry have become the nails to be hammered by the government’s henchmen, a.k.a. its guns for hire, a.k.a. its standing army, a.k.a. the nation’s law enforcement agencies.

The problem, as one reporter rightly concluded, is “not that life has gotten that much more dangerous, it’s that [authorities have chosen to respond to even innocent situations as if they were in a warzone.](#)”

A study by a political scientist at Princeton University concludes that militarizing police and SWAT teams “[provide no detectable benefits in terms of officer safety or violent crime reduction.](#)”

The study, the first systematic analysis on the use and consequences of militarized force, reveals that “police militarization [neither reduces rates of violent crime nor changes the number of officers assaulted or killed.](#)”

In other words, [warrior cops aren’t making us or themselves any safer.](#)

Indeed, as I document in my book [Battlefield America: The War](#)

[on the American People](#), it is increasingly evident that militarized police armed with weapons of war who are empowered to carry out pre-dawn raids on our homes, shoot our pets, and terrorize our families have not made America any safer or freer.

The sticking point is not whether Americans must see eye-to-eye on the pressing issues of the day, but whether we can agree that no one should be treated in such a fashion by their own government.