



The Bunkhouse Chronicle

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Columnist

The myth of militarization

Dramatic video of civil unrest incidents in the past few years or police tactical team deployments have once again raised the ugly, and ill-informed, boogeyman specter of the “militarized police.”

Critics cite the use of armored rescue vehicles — which they almost inevitably and absurdly describe as tanks, the acquisition of military surplus items such as grenade launchers, or MRAP vehicles (an armored anti-mine personnel carrier), or the individual weapons carried by police on their person.

Critics often cite the deployment of this equipment for “escalating” situations, and then bestow upon us all their judgment and expertise in handling large-scale civil unrest, or high-risk incidents. Unfortunately, they usually don’t have any

expertise at all, and do a very bad job of explaining how the presence of rescue vehicles or body armor causes people to burn down buildings or loot businesses.

These same critics often mix their complaints about such equipment with a dose of conspiracy theory — notions that the police are conspiring with various federal agencies, even the U.S. Army, to impose martial law. Generally, they ask their fellow citizens to believe that the cops are out to round up their grandmothers, steal their food cache, confiscate their weapons, and put everyone in internment camps.

Sprinkle in some paranoia, issues with authority, and an abject failure to understand even basic civics, the law as it relates to crowd control and most certainly the realities of modern policing, and you have a perfect concoction of bunk.

Armored rescue vehicles aren’t tanks. They don’t have cannons or machine guns. They simply are not a weapons system of any kind. They are equipped with armored portholes, and an armored turret, which can be occupied by officers carrying weapons. They CAN be outfitted with gas rams, used to inject gas into the walls of a barricaded house (usually too expensive an item for all but the largest tactical teams), but they are decidedly not up-gunned tanks.

They are essentially large armored cars, not much different than those used by banks, to safely transport money, and their purpose is to protect officers, and civilians, from gunfire or other life-threatening hazards in critical-incident scenarios.

Armored rescue vehicles are an important piece in the suite of capabilities available to police, so that they might safely conduct business, and they have proven themselves out numerous times.

In Tyler, Texas, for example, when a subject fired 35 rounds from an AK-47 at the cops, or in Wisconsin, when a barricaded subject was sniping at officers from his well-fortified house, or in Colorado, when Aurora police were able to rescue 108 motorists stranded in 20 inches of snow and arctic conditions, or in Bakersfield, California, when a subject opened fire in a neighborhood and BPD was able to safely evacuate 60 innocents from the line of fire.

I could go on citing these examples all day, but the point is that in modern policing, which many folks know precious little about even

as they shout to the world how cops should be doing their jobs, armored rescue vehicles are as important as good judgment, good training, less-lethal technologies, good radios, and individual body armor.

The critics cite “grenade launchers” in the inventory of police tactical teams, and the hand-wringing, eyebrow-shaving, and paranoia needles swing wildly into the red. The perception these critics would like to leave with you is that police departments are stockpiling anti-personnel grenades. Nope. Grenade launchers, of various kinds, have long existed in police inventories, and they are used exclusively to fire tear-gas canisters, less-lethal baton rounds, pepper balls, or beanbags — to disperse large, unruly crowds, like those who keep burning down family businesses and looting Auto Zones during “legitimate peaceful protests.”

There is no such thing as routine in police work, despite the regrettable and common media use of that term, and that is particularly true if you are the one making a late-night traffic stop in a remote area, with

intermittent radio service, or contacting a seven-foot, 350-pound parolee on the fringes of a meth psychosis, at 3 a.m. in an alley, alone.

Police work is a far more difficult and demanding job than most folks realize — because they are comfortable at home and they don’t have to think about it much, except when the latest round of use-of-force hyperbole hits the news. The cops aren’t asking for our sympathy. They know the risks; they know the job. But one thing we can do for them — for all of us — is to stop with the paranoia and conspiracy nonsense. It isn’t true *at all* and it isn’t helping anyone.

I want my cops out of their cars, confronting criminals, and I want them to have the best possible equipment and training to do the job with, so that the good guys and gals behind the badge get to go home at the end of each and every shift. They matter more to me than some guy breaking into houses, smoking meth, shooting up his neighborhood, beating his wife, or driving drunk on my highways. Maybe you think that, too.

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