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OPINION

Bracing for an Attack by Veterans

Military transfer program lacks rational explanation

BY JIM HIGHTOWER

From 1776 forward, Americans have opposed having soldiers do police work on our soil. But in recent years, Pentagon chiefs have



teamed up with police chiefs to circumvent that prohibition.

How? By militarizing police departments.

Through the little-known "military transfer program," the Pentagon now ships massive amounts of surplus war equipment to local cops. This reflects a fundamental rewiring of the mindset now guiding neighborhood policing.

Police chiefs today commonly send out squads brandishing heavy arms and garbed in

riot gear for peaceful situations. Recruiting videos now feature clips of SWAT-team officers dressed in black, hurling flash grenades into a home, then storming the house, firing automatic weapons. Who wants anyone enticed by that video working their neighborhood?

As a city councilman in rural Wisconsin commented when told his police were getting a nine-foot-tall armored vehicle: "Somebody has to be the first to say, 'Why are we doing this?'"

The town's police chief responded that, "There's always a possibility of violence." The New York Times reports. Really? Who threatens us with such mayhem that every burg needs a war-zone armory and a commando mentality?

Astonishingly, a sheriff's spokesman in suburban Indianapolis offered this answer: veterans.

The sheriff's department needed a mine-resistant armored vehicle, he explained, to defend itself against U.S. veterans re-

turning from the Afghanistan war.

War veterans, he said, "have the ability and knowledge to build (homemade bombs) and to defeat law enforcement techniques."

That's lame, loopy, insulting, shameful, and just plain stupid.

Maybe he just forgot to pack his brain when he left for work that day. But I'm afraid it's a window into the altered mindset of police chiefs and trainers.

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Inspiring Lessons from Seattle Pacific University

United by a common sense of faith

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

On June 14th I had the honor of giving the undergraduate commencement address at Seattle Pacific University. Commencement speakers usually do their best to share a lesson or two with the graduates, but this year Seattle Pacific students, administration, and faculty inspired me and people across the nation by how they responded after a campus tragedy that should have been unthinkable but instead has become all too routine: a shooting at their beloved school.



Just days before graduation a young man with a history of mental illness entered a science and engineering building on the university's campus armed with a shotgun and more than 50 rounds of ammunition and began firing.

He killed 19-year-old freshman Paul Lee, a young man with an enormous smile whose friends said he was known for his laugh and sense of joy, and wounded two other students before 22-year-old student security monitor Jon Meis pepper-sprayed and tackled him as he paused to reload, ending the deadly rampage. The shooter's plan had been to harm as many people as possible before taking

his own life.

The private Christian university's expressed mission is to equip students to engage the culture, change the world, and pursue scholarly excellence rooted in the gospel. How wonderful to see it in practice during such a difficult time. It brought the community closer together, united by a common sense of faith. While students expressed anger, there was also an immediate sense of forgiveness and mercy towards the shooter, with many expressing pity instead of hatred for him.

Jon Meis, the courageous student who stopped the attack, has been adamant about not wishing to be considered a hero. He helped set the tone in a powerful statement released after the shooting where he said: "[W]hat I find most difficult about this situation is the devastating reality that a hero cannot come without tragedy. In the midst of this attention, we cannot ignore that a life was taken from us, ruthlessly and without justification or cause. Others were badly injured, and many more will carry this event with them the rest of their lives. Nonetheless, I would encourage that hate be met with love. When I came face to face with the attacker, God gave me the eyes to see that he was not a faceless monster, but a very sad and troubled young man. While I cannot at this time find it within me to forgive his crime, I truly desire that he will find the grace of God and the forgiveness of our community."

South African Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the new *The Book of Forgiving* coauthored with his daughter says: "It is perfectly normal to want to hurt back when you have been hurt. But hurting back rarely satisfies. We think it will, but it doesn't. If I slap you after you slap me, it does not lessen the sting I feel on my own face, nor does it diminish my sadness over the fact that you have struck me. Retaliation gives, at best, only momentary respite from our pain. The only way to experience healing and peace is to forgive. Until we can forgive, we remain locked in our pain and locked out of the possibility of experiencing healing and freedom, locked out of the possibility of being at peace."

The genuine sense of forgiveness and grace at Seattle Pacific University is remarkable. The school's students, faculty, and administration truly struggle to live their faith. I was deeply moved that my mother's favorite hymn, "Great is Thy Faithfulness," opened the graduation ceremony, walling off despair though not sadness during this difficult time. Even in the middle of tragedy and loss there was also a profound sense of gratitude that the attack was able to be stopped before more life was lost.

At the same time we must all ask: could this have been prevented from happening at all? The shooter, who reportedly had an obsession with the shootings at Columbine High School and a long history of

mental illness, was detained and committed to mental health facilities twice before the attack at Seattle Pacific. In 2010 he called 911 to report he "had a rage inside him" and wanted to hurt himself and others, and in 2012 police found him lying intoxicated in a roadway, where he told officers he wanted a SWAT team "to get him and make him famous." Both times he was taken to a hospital for evaluation.

His history of involuntary commitments to mental health facilities should have barred him from possessing a gun. Washington State does require reporting of mental health records to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System, according to the Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, but does not have a universal background check law in place. At least one source says the shooter, who also reportedly worked for eight

years at a gun range, used that loophole and purchased his gun legally through a private seller.

I am so grateful to the Seattle Pacific University community for their witness of strength, forgiveness, and deep faith. Yet I am heartbroken that they and so many other children, youths, and adults walk in fear on a daily basis and keep having to worry about experiencing this at all. Why is our nation saturated with guns—four million in military and law enforcement hands and 310 million in civilian hands? Why are American children and teens 17 times more likely to die from gun violence than their peers in 25 other high-income countries combined? Why is our mental health system still so inadequate to respond to the cries of those needing help? When will we all say enough?

We can and must do better.

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