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Militarizing American Police: The Rise and Normalization of Paramilitary Units*

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This paper examines overlooked developments in contemporary policing: the growth in the number of, and a significant shift in the character of, United States police paramilitary units (PPUs). A survey of all police departments serving cities of 50,000 people or more provides the first comprehensive national data on PPUs. Findings document a rise in the number of PPUs, an escalation in their level of activity, a normalization of these units into mainstream policing, and a direct link between PPUs and the U.S. military. These findings reflect the aggressive turn many law enforcement agencies are assuming behind the rhetoric of community and problem-oriented policing reforms.

Metaphors play a central role in the construction of and reaction to social problems: they act to organize our thoughts, shape our discourse, and clarify our values (Ibarra and Kitsuse 1993; Spector and Kitsuse 1987). Sociologists have documented the spread of the medical metaphor — defining social problems as "illnesses" to be "treated" by medical professionals — as an important trend in twentieth-century social control (Conrad and Schneider 1992; Conrad 1992). This attention to medicalization neglects other social problems metaphors, particularly the metaphor of war (e.g., the War on Poverty, the war on drugs). The ideological filter encased within the war metaphor is "militarism," defined as a set of beliefs and values that stress the use of force and domination as appropriate means to solve problems and gain political power, while glorifying the tools to accomplish this — military power, hardware, and technology (Berghahn 1982; Eide and Thee 1980; Kraska 1993). Militarism influences many dimensions of social life, especially in societies such as the United States that place high value on military superiority (Sherry 1995). Just as the medicalization of social problems becomes intertwined with social thinking and problem construction outside the medical profession so does militarization affect multiple dimensions of the construction of and reaction to social problems outside the armed services.

Recent developments illustrate the profound impact the war metaphor has on a critical dimension of governmental activity external to the armed services — the criminal justice apparatus. The military model is the framework for correctional "boot-camps," the much publicized Waco, MOVE, and Ruby Ridge incidents, and most significantly the "war on drugs." Politicians, the media, and government officials joined in fueling drug war hysteria during the 1980s, leading Congress and two presidents to transform drug war discourse into tangible militarized action. By the early 1990s, all branches of the military, including most state national guards, were becoming "socially useful" by involving themselves in both domestic and international drug law enforcement (Kraska 1993; Committee on Armed Services 1988). The Clinton administration and congressional supporters extended the police/military connection by mandating that the Department of Defense and its associated private industries

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form a "partnership" with the Department of Justice to "engage the crime war with the same resolve they fought the cold war" (National Institute of Justice 1995:35).

The military and police comprise the state's primary use-of-force entities, the foundation of its coercive power (Bittner 1970; Enloe 1980; Kraska 1994; Turk 1982). A close ideological and operational alliance between these two entities in handling domestic social problems usually is associated with repressive governments. Although such an alliance is not normally associated with countries like the United States, reacting to certain social problems by blurring the distinction between military and police may be a key feature of the post-cold war United States. With the threat of communism no longer a national preoccupation, crime has become a more inviting target for state activity, both internationally and in the United States:

> Perhaps the most striking feature of the modern epoch is the homogeneity of forms of physical coercion. Armed forces, police forces, paramilitary forces around the world make use of the same type of military technology.... With the help of advisors and training courses, forms of command, patterns of operations, methods of recruitment also bear a global resemblance. For the first time in history, soldiers and policeman from different societies have more in common with each other than the societies from which they come (Kothari et al. 1988:22; see also Gibson 1994; Nadelman 1993).

These developments signal not only a strengthening of the "criminal justice-industrial complex" (CJIC) (Christie 1994; Quinney 1975), but a growing collaboration between the CJIC and the military-industrial complex in the post-cold war era (Kraska 1993). Although it has escaped the scrutiny of most criminological researchers, a significant feature of this trend may be the movement not just toward the police-ization of the military but also toward the militarization of civilian law enforcement in the form of police paramilitary units (PPUs).

Ignoring Police/Military Connections

Police history, with its emphasis on the night-watchmen and British "bobbies," glosses over how civilian police often formed out of militia groups and military soldiers or, conversely, out of an acute fear of military control (Brewer et al. 1988; Enloe 1980; Kraska 1994; Manning 1977; Weisenhorn 1995). Policing literature rarely examines police/military connections except when lamenting the poor decision made by policing's forefathers in choosing the traditional paramilitary police model (Angell 1971; Skolnick and Fyfe 1993). Speculating that the police could be anything but paramilitary denies the existence of the inherent bond — historically, politically and sociologically — between the police and military (Bittner 1970; Enloe 1980). Austin Turk (1982:21) makes clear this inherent connection in discussing the formation of civilian police forces in emerging states:

> As military dominance and jurisdiction are achieved in emerging governments, authorities consolidate their position by instituting a system in which internal control is accomplished by the process of policing instead of the more costly, more overt, and less efficient one of military control.

Scant attention has been paid, thus, to the emerging overlaps between police and military functions in the post-Cold War era (Kraska 1993). In the last decade most police academics have fixated on the professed turn toward community and problem-oriented policing. While transfixed on the "velvet glove," few have inquired into the possibility of a simultaneous strengthening of the "iron-fist" as a type of "backstage" phenomenon (Manning 1977;

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Crime and Social Justice 1983). Despite the overtly militaristic nature of U.S. police paramilitary units (PPUs), and their continued growth since the early 1970s, little academic research or discussion examines these units.[1]

Underlying the inattention paid to PPUs might be the assumption that they are sociologically and politically insignificant. Initially these units constituted a small portion of police efforts and were limited to large urban police departments. The constructed and publicly understood role of PPUs was confined to rare situations involving hostages, terrorism, or the "maniac sniper." Despite the camouflage of these common assumptions, there have been recent unmistakable signs of intensifying military culture in police departments. Although these units are highly secretive about their operations,[2] obvious expressions of militarism are found throughout contemporary policing in the form of changing uniforms, weaponry, language, training, and tactics (Kraska 1996).

Manning (1995) insightfully criticized police research and scholarship for its growing apolitical orientation as it preoccupies itself with concerns of bureaucratic efficiency. An apolitical gaze not only accounts for overlooking these units, but also for not labeling them with what might be misinterpreted as a politically charged tag — "police paramilitary unit." It is important to demonstrate, therefore, that these units differ markedly from "cop on the beat" policing and differ little from other internationally recognized PPUs in Britain (Special Patrol Groups), Italy (the Carabinieri), Germany (the Grenz Schutz Gruppe 9), France (the Gendarmerie National) or the federal police paramilitary teams in the United States (FBI, DEA, and BATF).

Distinguishing Characteristics of PPUs

As opposed to traditional police, paramilitary units can be distinguished in the following ways. PPUs are equipped with an array of militaristic equipment and technology. They often refer to themselves in military jargon as the "heavy weapons units," implying that what distinguishes them from regular police is the power and number of their weapons. The weapon most popular among these units is the Heckler and Koch MP5 submachine gun; its notoriety originates from elite military "special operations" teams, such as the "Navy Seals." The MP5's direct connection to elite military teams, its imposing futuristic style, an aggressive marketing and training program conducted by the Heckler and Koch corporation, and a host of hi-tech accessories such as laser sights and sound suppressers, all solidify this weapon's central place in police paramilitary subculture (Kraska 1996). Other weapons include tactical, semi-automatic shotguns, M16s, sniper rifles, and automatic shotguns referred to as "street-sweepers."

PPUs have an array of "less-than-lethal" technology for conducting "dynamic entries" (e.g., serving a search warrant). These include percussion grenades (explosive devices designed to disorient residents), stinger grenades (similar devices containing rubber pellets), CS and OC gas grenades (tear gas), and shotgun launched bean-bag systems (nylon bags of lead shot). "Dynamic entries" require apparatuses for opening doors, including battering rams, hydraulic door-jamb spreaders, and C4 explosives. Some PPUs purchase and incorporate a range of "fortified tactical vehicles," including military armored personnel carriers and specially equipped "tactical cruisers."

1. Stevens and MacKenna (1988) attempted a national study of SWAT units in 1986 but only obtained a 40% response rate. Their research focused on administrative issues, such as selection procedures and equipment use. Chambliss (1993) conducted field research on Washington D.C.'s Rapid Deployment Unit (RDU), documenting the repressive nature of this type of policing and its relationship to the crime control industry. *The Iron Fist and the Velvet Glove: An Analysis of the U.S. Police,* 3rd edition (Crime and Social Justice Associates 1982), written by the staff for the Center for Research on Criminal Justice at Berkeley, was the first to identify and critique the SWAT phenomenon.

2. Paramilitary units recently have become more visible in popular media. The television program *COPS* now periodically televises the work of paramilitary units in drug raids on private residences. The image of ninja-masked, paramilitary techno-cops also seems to be a growing theme in movies.

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A PPU's organizational structure is modeled after military and foreign police special operations teams in that they operate and train collectively under military command structure and discipline (Jefferson 1990). These teams wear black or urban camouflage "battle dress uniforms (BDUs)," lace-up combat boots, full body armor, Kevlar helmets, and sometimes goggles with "ninja" style hoods. Team members place a high premium on group solidarity and view themselves as "elite" officers, a view supported and promoted by police management (Kraska and Paulsen 1996).

Traditionally, PPU work differed significantly from routine policing. The bulk of these units formed in the late 1960s and early 1970s to respond to civil riots, terrorism, barricaded suspects, and hostage situations. Today, it is all but impossible to differentiate most PPUs by their work, except that it tends to be what each department defines as "high-risk." High-risk activities are generally defined as those situations that require a squad of police officers trained to be use-force-specialists. These squads have an intensified operational focus on either the threatened or the actual use of collective force.[3]

Despite these distinguishing characteristics, PPUs could indeed be considered inconsequential and perhaps functional if they handled only the narrowly defined terrorist or barricaded suspect situations, were housed in the largest departments under tight control, and had little impact on the operations and culture of their departments. However, the authors' ethnographic studies revealed a different set of circumstances (Kraska 1996; Kraska and Paulsen 1996), raising numerous research questions amenable to a national police survey.

As elaborated in the conclusion, the findings in this research have theoretical importance, despite their descriptive nature. For example, some police scholars argue that we are witnessing the demise of the coercive dimension of policing in "high modern" times (Reiss 1993).[4] A backstage trend toward the militarization of the police has important theoretical implications in a time when most academic discourse centers on "democratic" developments in policing (i.e., community policing). The conclusion explores the irony in this incongruity,

3. There is some confusion and controversy over Jefferson's (1990) use of the descriptor "paramilitary" in discussing police units and activities in the United Kingdom. Waddington (1993) charges Jefferson with an inexact "subjective" definition, while Hills (1995) so narrowly defines "paramilitarism" that paramilitary police activity only occurs when the police operate under the direct control of the actual military itself. At the risk of simplifying a complex debate, it seems to us that one must distinguish between indices of paramilitarism that *contribute* to labeling police units and their activities as "paramilitaristic," and those *necessary* factors that must be evident. In identifying a police unit and their activities as paramilitary, three necessary factors include: 1) the unit must be state-sanctioned, operating under legitimate state authority (we would exclude common "thuggery" exercised by a civilian paramilitary unit); 2) they must be trained and operate as a military special teams unit, such as the Navy Seals, with a strict command structure and discipline (or the pretense therof); and 3) they must have at the core and forefront of their function to threaten or use force collectively, instantaneously, and not necessarily as an option of last resort (e.g., conducting a no-knock drug raid). Two contributing factors — military appearance and military weponry — are critical in distinguishing paramilitary policing from standard policing, but they are not always necessary. For instance, many PPUs dress almost identical to military special operations teams. However, just as Navy Seals can dress-down into less militaristic or even plainclothes and still operate as a paramilitary unit, so can police paramilitary unites when conducting activities as "tactical-patrol."

4. Chevigny (1995:263) provides evidence that today's police rely less on the use of force: "physical torture has been largely eliminated, and the use of deadly force has been greatly reduced over the last generation." A reduction in *deadly force* does not necessarily indicate, however, a reduction in police use of violence. Clearly, a more accurate indicator of whether the police are more or less often engaging in force with the intention of death would be the rate at which police fired shots at another person. These data are more difficult to access. Geller and Scott (1992) report on these data for selected police agencies, finding that the rate at which police have discharged their weapons at people actually has increased in several departments during the late 1980s and early 1990s — coinciding with concerted police efforts in the drug war. With regards to PPUs and the use of deadly force, most highly trained and experienced PPUs have as a working credo "not to kill or be killed." This credo, as well as liability issues, probably explains the considerable interest in "less-than-lethal" technologies among PPUs. Expanding police use of force options is similar to correctional net-widening. Less-than-lethal technologies could reduce police use of deadly force, yet also expand the range of force options available to the police, and the situations in which these options are constructed as appropriate.

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not by emphasizing the seeming contradiction between the militarization of police and community policing but, instead, by stressing the interconnections and possible symbiotic relationship between these two developments.

Methodology

We constructed a 40-item survey (98 variables) to examine the growth and normalization of military tactics and ideology among and within United States law enforcement agencies. The instrument sought basic demographic information on the responding police agencies, and included an option for respondents to list their identity and phone number. It also sought both descriptive and longitudinal data on the formation, prevalence, uses, and activities of PPUs as they relate to the U.S. military. Finally, we solicited attitudinal information regarding the respondents' rationales for using PPUs.

Our sampling frame was all United States law enforcement agencies, excluding federal agencies, servicing jurisdictions of 50,000 or more citizens and employing at least 100 sworn officers. This list yielded a population of 690 law enforcement agencies across the states, representing all the various political subdivisions of state and local government. Because we could not determine whether four agencies identified in our sampling frame existed, they were excluded from the mailing.

An initial mailing of the survey was sent to the entire population of police agencies in January, 1996. This mailing included a letter of introduction, along with a copy of the survey instrument. Because of the secretive and suspicious character of police agencies (Manning 1978; Skolnick 1966; Westley 1956) and the difficulty in researching highly sensitive topics associated with policing (Kraska and Kappeler 1995), the introductory letter was written on a recognized sponsor's letterhead. This letter was signed by the principal researcher (first author) as well as the director of the professional organization that agreed to sponsor the research. It also noted the researchers' university affiliation.[5] The language used in the survey encouraged respondents to recognize the study as administratively oriented. This orientation, coupled with the authors' familiarity with PPU rhetoric and the promise of confidentiality and anonymity, likely provided a level of occupational comfort to the respondents.

Within four weeks, the first mailing yielded 413 responses, a 61 percent response rate. After approximately five weeks, a second wave of surveys was mailed to the remaining 281 non-respondents. The second mailing stressed the high level of participation among other law enforcement agencies and it urged cooperation from those departments without a PPU. After approximately 6 weeks, this follow-up mailing yielded an additional 135 responses for a total response rate of 79 percent.

The researchers selected 81 of the respondents that provided identification and telephone information for unstructured follow-up phone interviews. Forty agencies that used their PPU for proactive patrol work were selected at random; the remainder were called to have police officials elaborate on their responses. Each phone interview began with an introduction and a brief verification of the data provided on the written survey. We then explored the more sensitive and controversial aspects of PPUs. Interviews lasted between five minutes and one hour — the majority about 20 minutes.

5. Sponsorship was limited to the use of the association's letterhead. The association did not provide any resources nor did it have any input into the project beyond its initial approval. Without the endorsement of a recognized law enforcement organization, the response rate would likely have been significantly lower.

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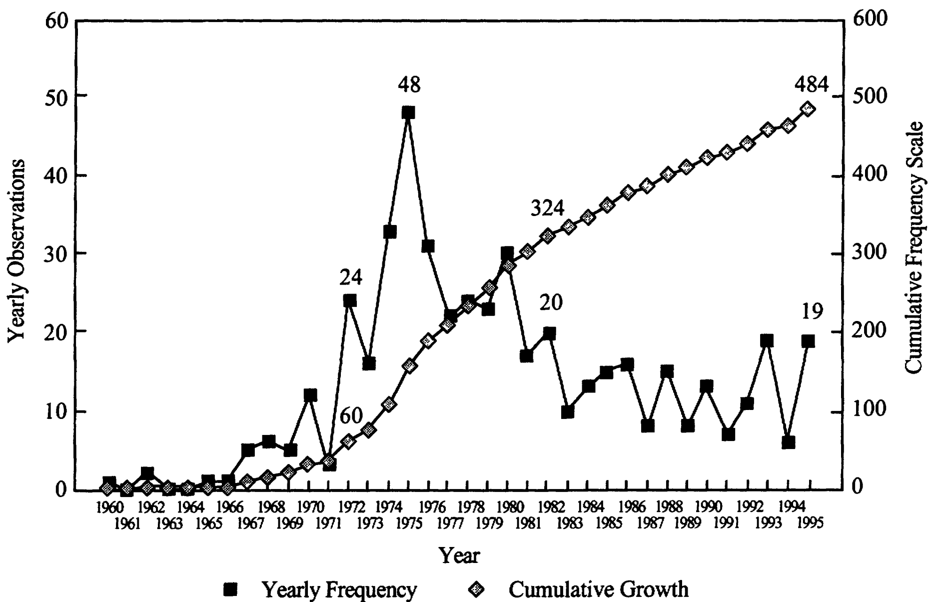
Escalating and Normalizing PPUs

Of the 548 departments responding, 89.4 percent had a police paramilitary unit. Over 20 percent of those departments without a unit said they were "planning on establishing one in the next few years." Although most departments formed their units in the 1970s, the percentage of police departments with PPUs has grown steadily (see Figure 1). In 1982, about 59 percent of the police departments surveyed had a PPU. By 1990, this figure had increased to 78 percent, and by 1995 it reached 89 percent. The bulk of the newer units were from smaller municipalities and state police agencies.[6]

Figure 1 • ***Year PPU Formed and Cumulative Growth***



Of course an increase in the number of PPUs, although an important indication of police militarization, means little without examining longitudinally the activities of these paramilitary units. Given the traditional role of PPUs, we might expect only a limited number of "deployments" in cases of barricaded suspects or civil demonstrations. Figure 2 reports on the mean "call-outs" — all emergency or high-risk deployments of the PPUs — for each of the years between 1980 and 1995. This graph depicts two sets of call-out data. The first includes all departments which provided call-out data for any of the years between 1980-1995 (marked as "total"). The second includes only those departments that had PPUs before 1980, and that provided complete data for all the years 1980-1995 (marked as "compl").

Regarding the "total" data set, between 1980-1983 the mean number of call-outs was fairly constant and minimal, with about 13 call-outs on average per year, or approximately one PPU deployment per month. The level of police paramilitary unit activity more than doubled by 1986, almost tripled by 1989, and quadrupled by 1995. If we only include those

6. Results from research just completed indicate an even more rapid growth in PPUs in smaller county and municipal police departments (departments serving populations between 25,000 and 50,000 with less than 150 officers). In 1985, 31 percent of these departments had a paramilitary unit; by 1995, 69 percent had a fully staffed paramilitary unit.

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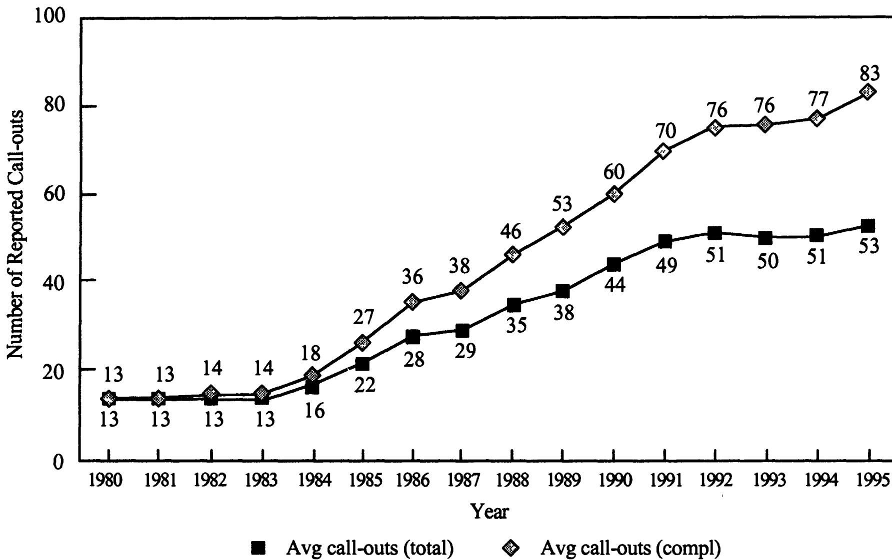
Figure 2 • ***Mean Call-outs Per Year***



departments that have had PPUs since 1980 (marked as "compl"), and that provided complete data from 1980-1995 (n=193), we find that the rise in paramilitary police activity is even more pronounced — a 538 percent increase.

This enormous growth in PPU activity documents an unprecedented yet little noticed phenomenon in U.S. policing — a dramatic increase in paramilitary policing activity. Moving from one call-out per month to four or five may only indicate a dramatic increase in the number of traditional PPU activities rather than normalization of these units into mainstream policing. Although we could not expect departments to provide data on the types of call-outs for every year, we did ask them for 1995 data on "barricaded persons," "hostage situations," "terrorist activity," "dangerous warrants," "civil disturbances," and "other activities." Of the total number of call-outs (n=25,201), civil disturbances accounted for 1.3 percent (n=338), terrorist incidents .09 percent (n=23), hostage situations 3.6 percent (n=913), and barricaded persons 13.4 percent (n=3,880). Respondents reported that the majority of call-outs were to conduct what the police call "high risk warrant work," mostly "drug raids." Warrant work accounted for 75.9 percent (n=19,125) of all paramilitary activity in 1995.

As shown in Figure 3, police using PPUs "proactively" for high-risk warrant work surged in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Phone interviews provided the researchers with insights into the significance of this phenomenon. Both large and small departments, with the exception of those few PPUs that have remained true to their original purpose (about 10 percent), gave essentially the same account. The drug war of the late 1980s and early 1990s required the servicing of an unprecedented number of search warrants and a lesser number of arrest warrants. Rather than reactively responding to traditional crimes such as robbery, the police can go into the population and proactively produce cases against an almost limitless number of drug users and low-level dealers (Barnett 1987) — hence, the dramatic increase in "call-outs." Most traditionally reaction-oriented PPUs enthusiastically accepted the new function of executing large numbers of warrants; many PPUs now conduct between 200-700 warrants/drug raids a year.

According to our respondents, "warrant work" consists almost exclusively of what police call "no-knock entries." Generally a search warrant is obtained through either a police informant or a tip from a neighbor. After securing a warrant, the paramilitary unit conducts a

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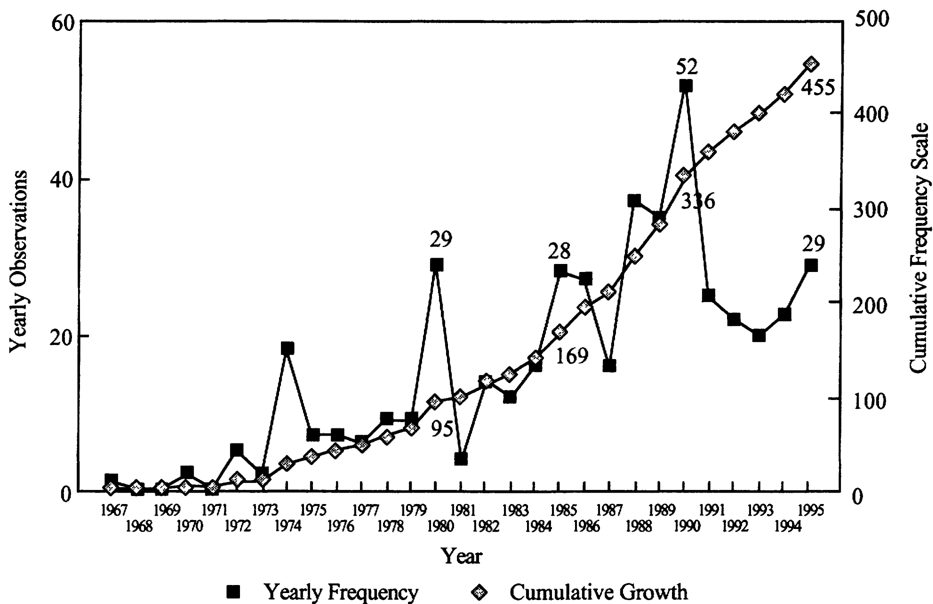
Figure 3 • ***Year PPU Began Warrant Work***



"dynamic entry," generally on a private residence. Some departments claimed that these "drug raids" do not even require a warrant if the police have reason to believe that waiting for a warrant would endanger lives or lead to the destruction of evidence.[7] As one commander described these operations, "our unit storms the residence with a full display of weaponry so we can get the drugs before they're flushed."[8] Some of the PPU commanders stressed that this type of proactive policing — instigated not by an existing high-risk situation but one generated by the police themselves — is highly dangerous for both PPU members and citizens.

7. The PPU in Chapel Hill, North Carolina conducted a crack-raid of an entire block in an African-American neighborhood. The raid, termed "Operation Redi-Rock," resulted in the detention and search of up to 100 people, all of whom were African-American (whites were allowed to leave the area). No one was ever prosecuted for a crime (Barnett v. Karpinos 1995).

8. According to our interviews the majority of warrants served by PPUs are executed as dynamic, no-knock entries. While constitutional provisions of the Fourth Amendment are intended to constrain and limit the situations and methods used in police searches, courts have endorsed the use of PPUs to serve routine search and arrest warrants (Kappeler 1993). Courts are more than willing to issue "no-knock if necessary" warrants, particularly in cases characterized as drug-related (Moss v. City of Colorado Springs, 1989; King v. Marmon, 1992). The ease with which police can obtain no-knock warrants and the almost unlimited "reasonable" justifications for deviating from the knock and announce requirement (Collier v. Locicero, 1993) partly account for increases in dynamic no-knock entries. The "if necessary" clause of the no-knock warrant has also given the police greater autonomy in how these raids are conducted. It is not uncommon for warrants to be issued based on fictitious police informants (Streetman v. Jordan, 1990; Hevey v. Estes, 1995), false or misleading information provided by police (Williams v. City of Detroit, 1994), or an officer's sole testimony concerning the detection of drug orders (U.S. v. Riveria, 1979). The growing list of exceptions to the Fourth Amendment's warrant requirement provides the police with near unlimited discretion in making the decision of whether to conduct a raid. Police now use the "administrative search exception" to the warrant requirement to conduct warrantless raids (Hamilton v. Lokuta, 1992). These raids often target locations deemed by the police to be community problems such as exotic dance halls, "drug-houses," private birthing clinics, or people the police previously, and often unsuccessfully investigated (Hummel-Toner v. Strope, 1994; Hamilton v. Lokita, 1992; Turner v. Upton County, Texas, 1990).

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A police official from a large southwestern police department explained: "In the early 90s we conducted 500 drug raids a year; things got way too dangerous and we cut way back." In this department, a team of ex-PPU members took over the warrant work after forming their own narcotics PPU. A specific incident led to this captain's negative view of drug raids:

> We did a crack-raid and got in a massive shoot-out in an apartment building. Shots were fired and we riddled a wall with bullets. An MP5 round will go through walls. When we went into the next apartment where the bullets were penetrating, we found a baby crib full of holes; thank god those people weren't home.

The interviewees also stressed that confiscating guns and money in these drug raids is as important as confiscating drugs. Several commanders noted how confiscated assets sometimes fund the purchase of new paramilitary equipment. It is critical to recognize, therefore, that doing "warrant work" is not just the perfunctory serving of a warrant subsequent to an in-depth investigation. Rather, it has become a proactive tool through which the police gather evidence and crudely conduct an investigation into suspected illegal activity. Marx (1988) has drawn considerable attention to police undercover narcotics investigations in the war on drugs. Few have noted this proactive policing tactic, perhaps more prevalent than undercover work, of PPUs conducting military-style investigatory drug raids on private residences.

These data demonstrate movement toward the normalization of paramilitary police groups. Another change that further substantiates the militarization of policing is patrol work. A recent article in a popular police magazine indicates just such a phenomenon. Police in Fresno, California pursue the goal of "proactive policing" by responding to what the article termed their inner-city "war zone" with a 40-man SWAT team, equipped with full military garb and weaponry. The objective of this full-time patrol-unit is to "suppress" the gang, drug, and crime problems. The article claims great success for this approach and sees it as an inevitable trend:

> The general consensus has been that SWAT teams working in a proactive patrol-type setting does work. Police officers working in patrol vehicles, dressed in *urban tactical gear* and armed with automatic weapons are here — and they're here to stay (Smith 1995:82; emphasis added).

Although we assumed the Fresno police department was an aberration, we still asked in the survey, "Is your department using the tactical operations unit as a proactive patrol unit to aid high crime areas?" Out of the 487 departments responding to this question, more than 20 percent (n=107) responded affirmatively. Using a PPU for patrol work was not limited to large metropolitan cities. Forty-seven percent (n=50) of the departments using their PPU for proactive patrol work served populations between 50,000 and 250,000; 20 percent (n=21) served populations between 50,000 and 100,000.

Figure 4 illustrates the year when each department began using its PPU for proactive patrol work. The graph shows a precipitous rise in normalizing paramilitary teams into patrol work. Since 1982, there has been a 292 percent increase (from 24 to 94) in the number of departments using PPUs for proactive patrol. Just since 1989, the number of departments deploying PPUs in this manner has doubled. As an indication of this trend continuing, 61 percent of the respondents agreed that: "Tactical Operations Units should be deployed to patrol high crime areas."

As Figure 4 shows, a few departments have used PPUs as patrol units since the late 1960s and early 1970s. Early PPUs sometimes engaged in "saturation patrol" of high crime areas, often in plain-clothes and unmarked cars. The question we needed answered, and one that was too threatening to ask in the survey itself, was whether the PPU patrolled in full "tactical gear" like the Fresno police department.

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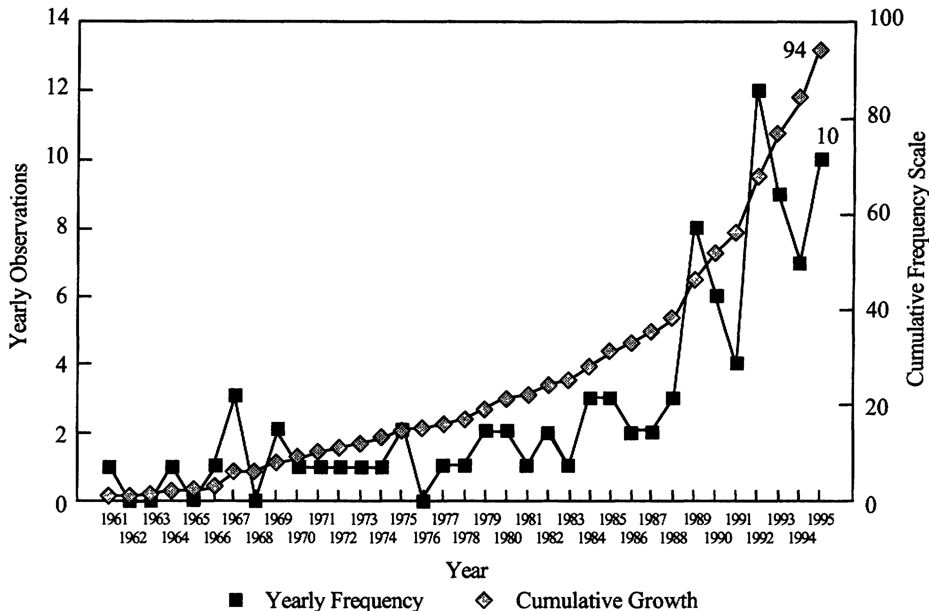
Figure 4 • ***Year PPU Began Pro-Active Control***



Forty departments that answered affirmatively to the patrol question were randomly selected for telephone interviews. We asked about their garb, weaponry, and tactics. Different departments employ a variety of methods, ranging from full military-like, aggressive patrol as found in Fresno (n=21), to patrol officers not dressed in full tactical gear but "slung with MP5s" (n=9), to PPU members in plain-clothes and standard police revolvers, carrying their full tactical gear and weaponry in car trunks (n=10). Some departments rotated these approaches depending on circumstances. One highly acclaimed community policing department described their latest approach:

> We're into saturation patrols in hot spots. We do a lot of our work with the SWAT unit because we have bigger guns. We send out two, two-to-four-men cars, we look for minor violations and do jump-outs, either on people on the street or automobiles. After we jump-out the second car provides periphery cover with an *ostentatious display of weaponry.* We're sending a clear message: if the shootings don't stop, we'll shoot someone [emphasis added].

Another commander described how his "progressive" police chief purchased a "SWAT bus" so that 30 tactical officers in full military gear could be deployed to "hot spots" throughout the city. "They geared up every night — 30 officers every night for four months." One mid-west police department that services a community of 75,000 people patrols in full-tactical gear using a military armored personnel carrier (termed a "peace-keeper") as their transport vehicle. The PPU commander described their approach as targeting:

> suspicious vehicles and people. We stop anything that moves. We'll sometimes even surround suspicious homes and bring out the MP5s. We usually don't have any problems with crack-heads cooperating."[9]

Two departments admitted they funded these very expensive operations with federal monies allocated for community policing programs — either by using these funds for overtime pay to

9. One PPU commander was overt about the intersection of militarism and racial bias in their paramilitary patrol work when he stated: "When the soldiers ride in you should see those blacks scatter."

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Table 1 • *Past and Current PPU Connections to the U.S. Military***

Past Connection to Military	*Yes*	
	%	*n*
Police with Special Ops. Exp.	45.7	219
Military Special Ops. Training	42.8	205
Current Connection to Military	*Yes*	
	%	*n*
Police with Special Ops. Exp.	30.0	146
Military Special Ops. Training	45.7	222

* excludes 11 non-respondents for the "past connection" category and four non-respondents for the "current connection" category.

PPU officers, or by hiring community policing officers and then transferring personnel to staff new PPU positions.

It is critical to note that several of the PPU commanders interviewed were shocked, and others displeased, to hear that other departments were patrolling in full tactical gear. One commander stressed that the practice not only would be offensive to the community he serves but, "operationally stupid. I realize some departments do that crap, it's just showing off — intimidation with no purpose." Another commander who disapproved of the practice did admit that his PPU members repeatedly request to wear their black BDUs on patrol. As he put it, "I can't blame them, we're a very elite unit, they just want to be distinguishable."

The elite self-perception and status granted these police units stems from the high status military special operations groups have in military culture (Gibson 1994; Kraska 1996). Although the shared culture between the police and military seems obvious, little evidence supported the notion that these two use-of-force institutions were connected materially and operationally. However, field research uncovered a pattern of former and reserve soldiers intimately involved in police special operations units, as well as active-duty soldiers "cross-training" with paramilitary police officers (Kraska 1996). This survey, therefore, inquired into the training activities of PPUs and its connection to the U.S. armed forces. While "training" may seem to be a purely technical exercise, it actually plays a central role in paramilitary subculture (Gibson 1994). Training constructs and reinforces the "dangerousness" of the group's work, the importance of feeling and thinking as a team, the belief that this elite team is doing "real" police work (see Kappeler et. al 1994), and the "pleasure" that comes from playing out "warrior fantasies" (Gibson 1994; Kraska 1996). An entire "tactical" culture revolves around PPU training in which units from all over the United States, sometimes from other countries, join together in annual training competitions. Interagency training is also prevalent; our survey found that 63 percent of PPUs provide training to other police agencies.

With regard to PPU's material connection with the U.S. armed forces, departments were asked first to identify the sources of training which were influential during the start-up period of their PPU. As seen in Table 1, almost 46 percent drew expertise from "police officers with special operations experience in the military." Similarly, 43 percent trained with "active-duty military experts in special operations." We then asked respondents to check those sources that currently provide training for the department's PPU. Table 1 shows that 30 percent of the departments received training from "police officers with special operations experience in the military," and almost 46 percent "trained with active-duty military experts in special operations."

Because 23 of the respondents wrote in the margin of the instrument that they train with either "Navy Seals" or "Army Rangers," we attempted to ascertain in phone interviews the extent and nature of this training. One respondent revealed the connection:

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> We've had special forces folks who have come right out of the jungles of Central and South America. These guys get into the real shit. All branches of military service are involved in providing training to law enforcement. U.S. Marshalls act as liaisons between the police and military to set up the training — our go-between. They have an arrangement with the military through JTF-6 [joint task force 6]. . . . I just received a piece of paper from a four-star general who tells us he's concerned about the type of training we're getting. We've had teams of Navy Seals and Army Rangers come here and teach us everything. We just have to use our judgment and exclude the information like: "at this point we bring in the mortars and blow the place up."

During the late 1980s drug war, the Bush administration established several Department of Defense "Joint Task Forces" responsible for coordinating drug interdiction operations at the borders, abroad, and domestically (Kraska 1993). This arrangement required substantial overlap and cooperation between the military and civilian police forces, to the point of having the armed forces' elite special operations teams cross-train with U.S. civilian police forces.

Implications and Discussion: Emerging Trends in Formal Social Control

Our research found a sharp rise in the number of police paramilitary units, a rapid expansion in their activities, the normalization of paramilitary units into mainstream police work, and a close ideological and material connection between PPUs and the U.S. armed forces. These findings provide compelling evidence of a national trend toward the militarization of U.S. civilian police forces and, in turn, the militarization of corresponding social problems handled by the police.[10] The data also reveal a continuing upward trend in proactive paramilitary policing activities. Before attempting to make sense of these phenomena in a broader context, it is important to review some policy-specific dangers associated with the rise and normalization of paramilitary policing.

First, the militarism inherent in PPUs escalates to new heights the cynical view that the most expedient route to solving social problems is through military-style force, weaponry, and technology. Second, the heightened ethos of militarism in these "elite" police units is potentially infectious for the police institution; many police departments have created specialized PPUs for patrol, narcotics, and gang "suppression." According to some commanders, PPUs are also the testing ground for incorporating tactical equipment, such as percussion grenades, into mainstream policing. Third, despite the belief among tactical officers that PPUs enhance officer and citizen safety, numerous incidents and common sense raise questions about the dangerousness of these units to officers and citizens.[11] Contemporary PPUs do not just react to pre-existing emergencies that might require highly trained teams of police officers. Instead, most PPUs proactively seek out and even manufacture highly dangerous situations. Finally, paramilitary policing is not just an urban "inner-city" phenomenon. These units target what the police define as high crime or disorderly areas, which most often are poor neighborhoods, whatever the city's size.

A comfortable and certainly not illogical interpretation of this research is that contemporary policing is experiencing two parallel developments: a well-publicized movement toward

10. We are not asserting that militarization is the only trend in policing, or even the predominant trend. As Manning (1995:609) states, ". . . policing is fragmented and polyphonic, contains a variety of discourses, and symbolizes various aims and values."

11. Seven of the police departments surveyed had sharp declines in PPU activity in the last few years. We called these departments out of curiosity and they explained that there had been a controversy over the PPU killing or wounding innocent people, sometimes while at the wrong residence, or instances where team members were shot by "friendly fire." These departments' chiefs "temporarily" cut-back on using the PPUs proactively.

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community accountability, responsiveness, and problem-solving, and another backstage development toward militarization. This research, therefore, might be set aside as only uncovering a dark side of contemporary policing. The extent to which PPUs have been normalized into mainstream policing indicates otherwise. A police commander's description of his PPUs role in community policing accentuates this observation:

> We conduct a lot of saturation patrol. We do "terry stops" and "aggressive" field interviews. These tactics are successful as long as the pressure stays on relentlessly. The key to our success is that we're an elite crime fighting team that's not bogged down in the regular bureaucracy. We focus on *"quality of life"* issues like illegal parking, loud music, bums, neighbor troubles. We have the freedom to stay in a hot area and clean it up — particularly gangs. Our tactical enforcement team works nicely with our department's emphasis on community policing [emphasis added].

This commander views community policing and militarized policing as linked symbiotically. Indeed, 63 percent of the respondents in this survey agreed that PPUs "play an important role in community policing strategies." Contemporary police reformers have asked the police to join together in problem-solving teams, to design ways to take control of the streets, to take ownership of neighborhoods, to actively and visibly create a climate of order, and to improve communities' quality of life (Bayley 1994; Goldstein 1990; Hoover 1996; Sherman 1995; Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux 1990; Wilson 1983, 1995; Worden 1996). Note how the PPU commander quoted above interpreted and implemented such "progressive" recommendations. Another self-proclaimed community policing chief provides a similar, although more blunt interpretation:

> It's going to come to the point that the only people that are going to be able to deal with these problems are highly trained tactical teams with proper equipment to go into a neighborhood and clear the neighborhood and hold it; allowing community policing and problem oriented policing officers to come in and start turning the neighborhood around.

Both interpretations of community and problem-oriented policing are consistent with a historically embedded police ideology and practice. Indeed, police departments throughout the United States are reverting, with the support of reform-minded police academicians, to highly aggressive tactics, many centering on precisely the paramilitary approach documented in this research (Cordner 1996; Hoover 1996; Hoover and Caeti 1994; Lacayo 1996; Sherman 1992, 1994, 1995; Sviridoff and Hillsman 1996; Worden 1996; Worden et.al 1994).[12] Three elements, then, are ideologically and pragmatically intertwined in an emerging form of policing: 1) the "war on crime and drugs" metaphor; 2) community and problem-oriented policing ideology; and, 3) the escalation and normalization of PPU activities.

Interestingly, the theoretical mortar troweled retroactively between these three elements is "routine activities theory" or what Sherman et al. (1989) calls a "criminology of place." Since the 1950s law enforcement has engaged in "pin-map" policing — conducting "saturation patrol" in those geographical spots with the most crime, or pins. Only recently, however, have we seen the academic and theoretical credentialization of this pin-map approach, along with a more sophisticated scientific discourse promoting the notion that the police need to "target aggregate populations," and social problems and spaces defined as criminogenic "hot-spots."[13] Considering the recent wave of U.S. Department of Justice research

12. The former Police Commissioner of the New York City Police Department is probably the most vocal, and boastful, regarding its recent implementation of their "get tough on crime" approach. He ridiculed "liberal criminologists" who have claimed that aggressive policing cannot reduce crime (Lacayo 1996). In April 1996, NYPD launched a "3,000 officer offensive" to "crush drug trafficking and the drug business" (Kraus 1996:1). Referring to the widespread use of narcotics paramilitary police teams and paramilitary patrol units, one reporter noted: "this drug initiative is likely to look something like a military campaign."

13. Notice the similarities to what Feeley and Simon (1992) label the "new penology." Just as the modern U.S. prison apparatus moves toward focusing on controlling aggregate populations instead of individual offenders, so are the

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monies targeted for police crime reduction programs and the political penchant for "get tough" measures, it should not be surprising that some of the police action emanating from this "theoretical orientation" includes paramilitary drug raids and patrol tactics. Significantly, the resurrection of these efforts are often governmentally sponsored and touted in police academic circles as "scientific experiments" and "problem-solving" tactics (Hoover 1996; MacKenzie and Uchida 1994; Sherman and Erez 1995). Again, it takes little acumen to recognize how the metaphor of "war" — with its emphasis on occupation, suppression through force, and restoration of territory — coincides naturally with the "new science" of the police targeting and taking control, indeed ownership, of politically defined social spaces, aggregate populations, and social problems with military-style teams and tactics.[14]

On a broader level, this research demonstrates the necessity of widening our theoretical gaze to include the police institution's larger role, nationally and internationally, in wielding and maintaining state power, particularly as these processes relate to militarization. The converging trends of the militarization of police and police-ization of the military in the post-Cold War era renders Enloe's (1980:8) admonishment to social, political, and police analysts even more compelling: "the military and police in any state have to be considered in a common framework. Police and military analysts too often follow separate lines of inquiry; this blinds them to the mutually dependent relationship the police and military have in reality in any state." The streamlining of these two use-of-force entities raises questions about the taken-for-granted separation between the military and police as a tenet of U.S. democratic governance. C. Wright Mills (1970:246) expressed concern for what he called the newly emerging means of violence — referring to the military-industrial complex. The trends identified here, in conjunction with the escalation of the "crime control industry" (Christie 1994), may portend an inwardly focused and more subtle "emerging means of violence": a form of paramilitarized violence found in a rapidly expanding criminal justice-industrial complex, with both ideological and material connections to the military-industrial complex.

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police and police experts emphasizing, under the guise of routine activities theory, controlling aggregate populations (neighborhoods) and the criminalization of social space.

14. On March 28, 1996, ABC nightly news televised a 14-man PPU from Toledo, Ohio, based on a "tip from a neighbor," conduct a no-knock, dynamic entry on an average household (in other words, not a "crack-house"). With MP5s slung, and in full military garb, the paramilitary officers stormed the residence and aggressively threw people on the ground while ransacking the place for drugs. They found what they came for: less than an ounce of marijuana in one of the teenager's bedrooms. On the grounds of the Clinton Administration's Housing and Urban Development regulation termed, "one strike and you're out," the police and media were excited to report that the entire family was evicted. This program illustrates how even the regulatory aspects of community and problem-oriented policing can be intertwined with paramilitary policing tactics.

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