

Inside the Ring

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Directive outlines Obama's policy to use the military against citizens

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A 2010 Pentagon directive on military support to civilian authorities details what critics say is a troubling policy that envisions the Obama administration's potential use of military force against Americans.

The directive contains noncontroversial provisions on support to civilian fire and emergency services, special events and the domestic use of the Army Corps of Engineers.

The troubling aspect of the directive outlines presidential authority for the use of military arms and forces, including unarmed drones, in operations against domestic unrest.

"This appears to be the latest step in the administration's decision to use force within the United States against its citizens," said a defense official opposed to the directive.

Directive No. 3025.18, "Defense Support of Civil Authorities," was issued Dec. 29, 2010, and states that U.S. commanders "are provided emergency authority under this directive."

"Federal military forces shall not be used to quell civil disturbances unless specifically authorized by the president in accordance with applicable law or permitted under emergency authority," the directive states.

"In these circumstances, those federal military commanders have the authority, in extraordinary emergency circumstances where prior authorization by the president is impossible and duly constituted local authorities are unable to control the situation, to engage temporarily in activities that are necessary to quell large-scale, unexpected civil disturbances" under two conditions.

The conditions include military support needed "to prevent significant loss of life or wanton destruction of property and are necessary to restore governmental function and public order." A second use is when federal, state and local authorities "are unable or decline to provide adequate protection for federal property or federal governmental functions."

"Federal action, including the use of federal military forces, is authorized when necessary to protect the federal property or functions," the directive states.

Military assistance can include loans of arms, ammunition, vessels and aircraft. The directive states clearly that it is for engaging civilians during times of unrest.

A U.S. official said the Obama administration considered but rejected deploying military force under the directive during the recent standoff with Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy and his armed supporters.

Mr. Bundy is engaged in a legal battle with the federal Bureau of Land Management over unpaid grazing fees. Along with a group of protesters, Mr. Bundy in April confronted federal and local authorities in a standoff that ended when the authorities backed down.

The Pentagon directive authorizes the secretary of defense to approve the use of unarmed drones in domestic unrest. But it bans the use of missile-firing unmanned aircraft.

“Use of armed [unmanned aircraft systems] is not authorized,” the directive says.

The directive was signed by then-Deputy Defense Secretary William J. Lynn. A copy can be found on the Pentagon website:

<http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/corres/pdf/302518p.pdf>.

Defense analysts say there has been a buildup of military units within non-security-related federal agencies, notably the creation of Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams. The buildup has raised questions about whether the Obama administration is undermining civil liberties under the guise of counterterrorism and counternarcotics efforts.

Other agencies with SWAT teams reportedly include the Department of Agriculture, the Railroad Retirement Board, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the Office of Personnel Management, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Education Department.

The militarization of federal agencies, under little-known statutes that permit deputization of security officials, comes as the White House has launched verbal attacks on private citizens' ownership of firearms despite the fact that most gun owners are law-abiding citizens.

A White House National Security Council spokeswoman declined to comment.

President Obama stated at the National Defense University a year ago: “I do not believe it would be constitutional for the government to target and kill any U.S. citizen — with a drone or with a shotgun — without due process, nor should any president deploy armed drones over U.S. soil.

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