WHY WE MUST DISBAND THE NYPD’S STRATEGIC RESPONSE GROUP

CRACKING DOWN ON DISSENT

Police have a long history of suppressing dissent and the NYPD has its own checkered past of protest policing. In 2015, the NYPD’s aggressive policing of protest took on its newest form: the Strategic Response Group (SRG). The SRG is a notoriously violent rapid response unit. Despite promises from the department that the unit would not be deployed at protests, the SRG has consistently threatened, attacked, and arrested protesters. Time and time again, when SRG arrives on the scene, officers escalate situations and injure New Yorkers who are exercising their First Amendment rights.

THE PROBLEMS

Biased Training

The SRG is trained to suppress protesters, especially those demanding racial justice. The SRG’s bike squad manual identifies two types of protester crowds: “peaceful” and “violent.” Examples of violent crowds include “BLM movement, Occupy Wall Street, and Anti-Trump Demonstrators.” These trainings include guidelines for the deployment of sound cannons and tactical formations to trap and mass arrest protestors. There is no focus on First Amendment protections or de-escalation strategies.

Bloated Budget

Within a year of the SRG’s founding, the unit’s budget ballooned from $13 million to over $133 million. The number of officers in the unit doubled to an estimated 700. The NYPD offers very little transparency on the funding, staffing, and deployment of SRG in our communities.

Despite the Department’s initial claims that the SRG would engage in counterterror work, the NYPD’s public description of the unit does not include counterterrorism. Instead, other units, like the Critical Response Command, perform counter terror work. In fact, nearly every policing activity the SRG performs is already carried out by other NYPD agencies. The only unique role the SRG seems to fill is its heavy specialization in the suppression of protest.
The SRG is emblematic of the NYPD’s tendency to use its bloated budget to inflict violence with impunity. Combatting the SRG’s brutality means putting an end to the SRG itself. The unit should be disbanded. Moreover, to ensure that the SRG and its tactics are not recreated under another name, the practice of policing protests with violence and brutality must end.

The SRG is the most recent and most extreme manifestation of the NYPD’s aggressive approach, but the shortcomings of our current system of protest policing run much deeper. Police forces who look and act like an invading army do not belong in our communities or in our streets. Instead of investing tens of millions in the SRG, we should plunge resources into community programs and care services that keep New Yorkers safe.

There is a long history of misconduct amongst SRG officers.

The NYCLU’s database of CCRB complaints shows that SRG officers receive an abnormally high number of misconduct complaints compared to non-SRG officers. Of officers who were named in at least one complaint while in SRG, the median number of complaints since 2000 is six. The median number of complaints received since 2000 for all officers in the database is three.

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