

THE DEFENSIVE FUNCTION OF THE POLICE AND MILITARISM IN POLICING

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Abstract: The topic of this paper is two interconnected phenomena: the defensive function of the police and militarism in policing. The aim of the paper is to, through a review and analysis of relevant literature, point out the specifics of the defensive function of the police, which is activated exclusively in non-peacetime situations, such as a state of war or a state of emergency. In such circumstances, the police, in addition to performing their regular duties and tasks from the peacetime scope, also act as an auxiliary body of the armed forces. On the other hand, the subject of the analysis is also the phenomenon of militarism in policing, which is reflected in the adoption of military equipment, tactics, values, and organizational culture within the police organization. Although numerous studies point to the harmful consequences of militarization, such as the disruption of community relations, an increase in police violence, and the weakening of the social-service function of the police, the paper also points to a paradoxical connection between these phenomena. Namely, certain militaristic elements within the police organization can facilitate the integration of the police into the defense system in a non-peacetime state, that is, when its defense function is activated. The paper concludes that the key challenge for modern police systems is finding a balance between maintaining a democratic, service-oriented model in peacetime conditions and the need for an effective transformation for the purpose of state defense in non-peacetime situations.

Keywords: *police, function, defense, militarism, military*

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Introduction

In organizational terms, a function is understood as a set of all activities performed with the same objective, whereby these activities do not necessarily have to be related. On the contrary, they may be very different (Subošić & Stevanović, 2023). Accordingly, the function of the police is understood as a set of police activities carried out with a specific objective, usually aimed at achieving or protecting certain social values, brought together under a common denominator—security. It should be emphasized that the content of a function, in a broader sense, in addition to objectives and activities, also includes results, criteria, modes, methods, as well as principles and so-called “functional regulations” (Milošević & Subošić, 2006, p. 400). Given that the range of tasks and duties performed by the police is broad, it is necessary to distinguish and group them into different police functions (Friedman, 2021). Professor Dane Subošić (2017) identifies a total of eight police functions: protective-security, administrative, criminal, misdemeanor, normative, educational, defensive, and social-service. He emphasizes that the protective-security function of the police represents a synthesis of all other functions, since security is the general objective of performing all police activities. Observing security as an objective, it can be stated that in all democratic societies “the effectiveness of the police is measured and evaluated through the state of security in the country” (Pušeljić & Jelenski, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, the essence of the police function, regardless of different theoretical approaches, lies in performing activities aimed at maintaining and improving the internal security of the state, primarily public security (Jovičić & Šetka, 2024; Masleša, 2011).

However, the only situation in which the police function implies activities in the service of the external security of the state is a non-peace-time condition, when one may speak of the defensive function of the police. This function is strictly limited, and through its implementation the police act as an auxiliary body of the armed forces, primarily under military command, while simultaneously performing all other activities and tasks within their regular scope of work and jurisdiction. This points to a clear division: the police are primarily responsible for internal affairs, while the military are primarily responsible for external defense (Manning, 2014). Nevertheless, throughout history these functions have not always been separated and were most often “in the hands” of a single body—the armed forces. Namely, internal security (the police function) and external defense (the military function) were historically intertwined and formed part of the same activity of the ruling class, that is, of a single armed force serving the ruling class (Robinson & Scaglione, 1987). This explains the emergence of certain militaristic characteristics even within contemporary police organizations—namely, militarism in policing.

For this reason, when discussing modern society, one of the key challenges in the transformation of the police is “to keep it separate from the military” (Pino & Wiatrowski, 2006, p. 112). The demilitarization of the police represents an important segment of the process of adapting police organization and function to the values of a democratic society, as well as of bringing the police closer to the community they serve and whose security needs they fulfill. It is a process of transforming the police organization from the form of a “semi-military formation” into an organization that oc-

cupies a new place and role in the community—as a partner, rather than a “controller in a constant or potentially possible confrontation” (Đukić et al., 2015).

The subject of this paper is two interrelated phenomena—the defensive function of the police and militarism in policing. The aim of the paper is to point out, through a review and analysis of relevant literature, the specific characteristics of the defensive function of the police, which is activated exclusively in non-peacetime conditions, such as a state of war or a state of emergency. In such circumstances, in addition to performing their regular peacetime duties and tasks, the police act as an auxiliary body of the armed forces. On the other hand, the paper also analyzes the phenomenon of militarism in policing, which is reflected in the adoption of military equipment, tactics, values, and organizational culture within police organizations. Furthermore, the paper seeks to analyze and synthesize existing research on these issues in order to contribute simultaneously to scientific and educational disciplines concerned with the organization and activities of the police and the military. Taking into account limitations related to the scope of the paper, the aim was also to point to the need for further research in this area, as well as to the need for its incorporation into the curricula of certain scientific and educational institutions.

Functions of the Police

In order to understand the essence and significance of the defensive function of the police, it is necessary to briefly consider the other police functions as well. These functions are exercised by the police under all conditions and circumstances, both in peacetime (regular) and in non-peacetime situations (states of emergency or war). However, the defensive function of the police is “activated” only in non-peacetime conditions, when the police significantly change their mode of operation and when functional regulations in the field of internal affairs are temporarily suspended, modified, or newly adopted. Therefore, the following section will focus on the other, regular functions of the police.

The administrative function of the police refers to two important groups of police activities. The first group includes activities related to the control of the legality of the work of certain authorities and organizations vested with public powers to perform specific administrative tasks. These activities usually fall within the domain of traffic safety, the production and trade of hazardous materials, fire protection, private security, and similar areas. The second group of activities within the administrative function of the police concerns matters of citizenship, the unique personal identification number of citizens, the issuance of personal documents, control of the acquisition, possession, and carrying of weapons and ammunition, and all other activities related to the so-called personal status of citizens (Subošić, 2017). In addition, the police assist other state authorities when those authorities are unable to enforce their own decisions without police support. Thus, within its administrative function, the police are responsible for controlling one segment of administrative activities and directly performing another segment (Jovičić & Šetka, 2023).

As one of the subjects of the security system, through the exercise of its criminal function the police suppress crime as a conventional security threat. In the literature,

this function is defined as a set of activities related to the prevention and repression of crime, that is, the prevention, detection, and reporting of criminal offenses, the identification and apprehension of perpetrators, and their transfer to the competent judicial authorities, with the aim of achieving the most favorable possible state of security (Subošić, 2017). At the same time, in this way the police contribute to the realization of the judicial function of the state in criminal matters.

The misdemeanor function of the police encompasses all activities related to the prevention and repression of misdemeanors in various areas of security and social life. These misdemeanors are prescribed by an entire set of laws over whose implementation the police exercise supervision (Jovičić & Šetka, 2023). Thus, this function includes activities related to the prevention, detection, and processing of misdemeanors through the issuance of misdemeanor tickets or by submitting requests for the initiation of misdemeanor proceedings before the competent court.

The normative function of the police refers to activities related to the preparation, amendment, and supplementation of normative acts—regulations in the field of security, primarily public security (most often bylaws, orders, and instructions). The police also participate in the drafting of regulations from other areas when there is a need to involve police authorities due to the subject matter being regulated. Through this function, the police contribute to the realization of the legislative function of the state.

Within the educational function, employees of the police organization acquire the theoretical and practical knowledge and skills necessary for performing the duties to which they are assigned or to which they may be assigned in the future. It should be noted that knowledge represents an organizational category, that is, an organizational resource used for the purpose of achieving the maximum level of efficiency (Subošić, 2017). Given the complexity and diversity of police tasks and duties, knowledge management is of exceptional importance for the police organization. In the modern concept of human resource management in policing, this has been recognized, and issues of education and training of police personnel are approached strategically. In addition, police officers are required to engage in continuous professional development. The educational function of the police includes education, training, professional qualification, and professional development.

In contemporary conditions, in addition to the traditional role reflected in the suppression of crime, the social dimension of police activity is becoming increasingly prominent. As emphasized by Vukašinović-Radojičić and Subošić (2007), the role of the police is not exhausted by repressive functions alone but is increasingly reflected in meeting the needs and interests of society. This approach defines the so-called “service” or “social-service” character of the police function, which implies effective cooperation with citizens and the provision of assistance and services not only to them but also to other state and non-state actors. In this way, the police are transformed into a modern service and public institution that, through mechanisms of social control, also contributes to the overall well-being of the community. Police officers, as “crime fighters,” believe that crime represents a rational choice by offenders and see the primary task of the police as bringing them before judicial authorities. On the other hand, police officers as “providers of social services” consider crime to stem from more complex social causes. They advocate prevention, education, and the building

of relationships with the community, which leads to a less aggressive approach. In practice, there are no “pure” types, but the dominant belief shapes the role of the police (Novak et al., 2022).

Thus, in a democratic society, the police cannot be perceived solely as an organization that suppresses crime through the use of coercive measures or force. The police have evolved into an organization with a pronounced social-service dimension and are, accordingly, a “service” that provides citizens with “security services.” In this regard, the police are most often the authority that acts first in various situations and events which may ultimately prove not to fall within their jurisdiction. As early as Bittner (1970) noted, the fundamental function of the police is not merely the enforcement of law, but also responding to urgent, ambiguous, conflictual, and unpredictable situations that do not necessarily fall within their exclusive competence. In this context, as stated by Reiss (1971), the police are the leading community service for responding to emergencies of a personal and social nature. When they need assistance, citizens will first turn to the police, regardless of whether another public service may be competent to resolve their problem. This primarily refers to providing various forms of assistance to citizens, advice and information, referral to competent authorities, first aid, and similar forms of support. Pušeljić and Jelenski (2007), for example, speak of a service-oriented model of police work, which implies the role of the police as helpers to citizens and moderators in solving their problems.

After briefly outlining the other police functions, in accordance with the topic and objectives of this paper, special attention will be devoted to the defensive function of the police.

The Defensive Function of the Police

When discussing a particular situation in which a state finds itself, and when that situation is such that it prevents the normal functioning of the state and society (a crisis situation), the organization and function of the police undergo certain changes. Namely, the police shift from a standard mode of operation to a crisis mode, whereby their tasks usually include securing endangered areas, establishing and maintaining public order, organizing the protection and rescue of people and property, and suppressing criminal behavior under conditions of increased social instability (so-called “opportunistic crime”). In such circumstances, police forces operate in coordination with other actors of the security system, but within a unified management system (Pejanović et al., 2018). Primarily, the role of the police depends on whether they can serve as an extended arm of the government for command and coordination, or whether their role is reduced to providing assistance to another authority, most often the military (Kešetović et al., 2013).

There are a number of specific security situations in which a state may find itself, and the literature offers various classifications of these situations. Generally, these are non-peace-time and other special security states that are declared by competent state authorities in a constitutionally prescribed manner. When speaking of war or armed conflict, that is, a state of war, the police assume expanded functions—from intelligence activities and control of movement to counterterrorism and the protection

of strategic facilities. The role of the police remains primarily related to preserving internal stability and implementing public security measures, but in coordination with the armed forces, as their auxiliary body (Pejanović et al., 2018). Thus, in this case, we are speaking of the defensive function of the police. Under conditions of a state of war or a state of emergency, the role of the police is prescribed by law, that is, by norms of national as well as international law. It is of great importance that the police adapt, both organizationally and functionally, to the acts adopted precisely for the purpose of eliminating such a situation. Accordingly, the police change their mode of operation in the prescribed manner and adapt their organization. It should be emphasized that the police do not assume the role of the military but, indirectly, support military efforts in the defense of the country, while obligatorily performing their regular tasks and duties, which they also carry out in peacetime conditions, that is, exercising all the functions previously described.

The key issues within the domain of the defensive function of the police concern the relationship between the military and the police, as well as the specific features of police organization and jurisdiction under conditions of a state of emergency or war, that is, non-peacetime conditions. The content of the defensive function of the police is determined by a special legal regime—legal regulations, primarily norms from the fields of defense and internal affairs. In addition, the fundamental principles of the defensive function of the police are defined by international law of armed conflict, humanitarian law, police law, and human rights law. For example, according to the Geneva Conventions, police officers have the status of civilians during a state of war, with the exception of those police officers who, individually or as part of a police unit to which they belong, are incorporated into the armed forces and thereby acquire combatant status (Stevanović et al., 2012). This simultaneously means that the police as an organization, its members, and its facilities cannot constitute a legitimate military objective, except for those parts that are engaged as part of the armed forces and under military command, and only for the duration of such engagement. In cases of such engagement, specific organizational units of the police are placed under military command (joint operations). In all other situations during non-peacetime conditions, relations between the police and the military are based on cooperation as a form of coordination.

During the duration of non-peacetime conditions, the police adapt their own organization and function to newly emerged circumstances, as well as to any new regulations adopted for the purpose of crisis management (e.g., decrees with the force of law). Organizational changes include the engagement of a larger number of police officers, the activation of reserve or auxiliary police units, changes in work regimes, and the provision of additional material, technical, and financial resources for police work. Changes of a functional nature primarily relate to the possibility of granting expanded or new powers to police officers in order to enable the effective performance of their regular duties and tasks under non-peacetime conditions. With the expansion of police powers, the possibility of their overstepping and abuse by police officers also increases, primarily due to the specific nature of the prevailing situation, in which the detection of abuses is reduced. As concluded by Stevanović and Subošić (2013, p. 154), “the police, in non-peacetime and other special security situations, retain and

adapt to the newly emerged conditions their peacetime scope of activities, organizational structure, powers, and legal status as a civilian service, unless and until the competent authority, in accordance with the Constitution and the law, international humanitarian law, and human rights law, decides to incorporate certain organizational units of the police into the armed forces in an international armed conflict.”

Furthermore, in the context of exercising the defensive function of the police, it is important to point out the connection between this function and police work within the security sector. Namely, a police authority that exercises its jurisdiction over the entire territory of the state organizes its regular work process while respecting the territorial principle of police organization (Subošić, 2013), that is, the principle of knowledge of persons and territory (Jovičić & Šetka, 2023). This refers to sector-based policing, that is, police work within the security sector, which implies dividing the area of responsibility of police stations into security micro-areas. This is done in order to facilitate the performance of security tasks within a given territory, taking into account security issues, significant and criminogenic individuals, facilities of importance, terrain configuration, and similar factors. Police tasks within the security sector are performed by sector leaders and police officers who must be permanently assigned in order to effectively monitor the security situation. Since the defense of the state implies the conduct of military operations in the field, the police can play a significant role as an auxiliary body by making available to military authorities precisely sector leaders and other police officers working in the sector, due to the fact that they possess the best knowledge of the specific territory, facilities, and persons living there. Their familiarity with local realities can be of great assistance to military units conducting operations in a particular area, while simultaneously respecting all that has been stated regarding the relationship between the military and the police in non-peacetime conditions. Thus, it can be concluded that the resources available to the police, in terms of security and criminalistic control of terrain, represent a significant link in the chain of national defense.

For example, during the armed conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023, police forces of Armenia and Azerbaijan performed different tasks, as could be observed from media reports on the conflict between the two countries. In Armenia, the police were predominantly engaged in suppressing internal unrest. In Yerevan, units of the state riot police used force to disperse demonstrations in support of Karabakh and to secure state institutions. In contrast, after Azerbaijan established control over the region, Azerbaijani police were deployed directly in Nagorno-Karabakh to establish and maintain public order and to protect the local population. In short, Armenian police officers were tasked with suppressing domestic unrest, while Azerbaijani police units assumed the role of stabilization and maintenance of order in territories brought under control. From this recent example, it can be seen how, under non-peacetime conditions, the roles of police forces on both sides of the conflict were adapted.

In conclusion, the defensive function of the police is the only police function that is not constantly “active.” It is activated under non-peacetime conditions, primarily in a state of war. At that time, the police are temporarily placed at the disposal of the defense system, while the exercise of all regular police functions must not be compromised. For this purpose, the organization and function of the police may undergo

significant changes. However, it is important to note that the speed with which the police adapt to non-peace-time conditions largely depends on the existing level of police militarization within a given society. Therefore, in the continuation of this paper, the phenomenon of militarism in policing will be addressed, and some of its advantages and disadvantages will be highlighted.

Militarism in Policing

The historical development of policing is inextricably linked to the phenomenon of militarism, in which police and military functions were often inseparable and, in many cases, integrated within the same organizations (Robinson & Scaglione, 1987; Masleša, 2011). Thus, McMichael (2016) argues that the police and the military have always been connected, and that policing tactics have frequently derived from the legacy of colonial and counterinsurgency wars. The separation of these two forces represents an ideological construct of liberalism rather than a historical fact. As early as antiquity, basic policing functions were in the hands of rulers and military commanders (and even slave owners), and this practice continued in the Roman Empire, where for extended periods the military performed policing duties. A similar model was transferred to the feudal system, in which state functions, including the military and the police, were concentrated in a single person—the feudal lord. During the period of absolutist monarchies, this connection was further formalized, and the police were organized according to the model of the military establishment, which enabled the training of specialists for military-political repression. Robinson and Scaglione (1987) illustrate this through examples of military societies among Indigenous tribes, such as the Cheyenne, which performed policing duties, including the supervision of warriors during wartime. The clearest example of the evolution of this model is the development of the Zulu state, where “age-grade societies” of young men, which originally had both military and policing tasks, were transformed into formal military regiments that simultaneously functioned as the police. Similarly, in the Kingdom of Buganda, rulers relied on armed forces to maintain internal order, using armed bodyguards and a standing army for policing tasks, including the functions of secret police and executioners. According to Professor Rama Masleša (2011), this historical legacy continues to influence contemporary police systems, which is why the traditional bureaucratic model of police organization still retains “paramilitaristic characteristics.”

The militarization of the police represents a complex process that can be examined through several dimensions of militarism: the material dimension—military weapons, equipment, and technology; the cultural dimension—military language, style (appearance), beliefs, and values; the organizational dimension—the military-style structure of police organizations (command and control centers) or the organization of elite police units modeled on military special forces; and the operational dimension—the modeling of activities according to military patterns, especially in addressing high-risk situations (Bieler, 2016; Kesić & Zekavica, 2018; Steidley & Ramey, 2019). It can be argued that militarism in policing is a phenomenon deeply rooted in its historical development, which has produced both similarities and differences between the police and the military. Perhaps the most important difference between these two armed

formations lies in their dominant object of protection: in the case of the police, it is people (citizens), whereas in the case of the military, it is the state. In addition, there are significant functional and organizational differences that have crystallized within the current stage of development of democratic society. On the other hand, the similarities that still exist between the police and the military reflect the historical development of the state apparatus.

In certain countries, there are specific military-police organizations—gendarmeries—that even operate within ministries responsible for defense, applying military ranks and similar hierarchical structures. In France, for example, the National Gendarmerie is a military-police organization headed by a director who, for certain duties, is accountable to the Minister of the Interior, and for other duties to the Minister of Defense (Šetka & Đukić, 2025). In the Republic of Serbia, by contrast, the Gendarmerie is organized as a special police unit within the headquarters of the Police Directorate (Jovičić & Šetka, 2023). Although it has no organizational ties with the Ministry of Defense or the Serbian Armed Forces, the Gendarmerie exhibits certain militaristic characteristics. In some countries, gendarmeries are entirely integrated into ministries responsible for defense (e.g., the Netherlands and Poland). A detailed analysis of the organization and jurisdiction of gendarmeries in individual countries exceeds the scope of this paper; nevertheless, these are common organizational forms that some authors describe as military formations endowed with police powers.

While proponents argue that militarization represents a form of professionalization that provides the police with necessary tools to combat contemporary threats and enables more effective use of force, critics respond that there is no solid empirical evidence that militarization improves police performance. They warn that militarization changes the nature of police work, encouraging the use of violence in situations where it is unnecessary (Steidley & Ramey, 2019). Bittner (1970) notes that the military model is attractive to senior police management for several reasons. First, there are superficial similarities between the military and the police, as both services are instruments of force that must remain in a high state of readiness. Second, he argues that American policing was historically influenced by local politics, corruption, and laziness, and that military discipline was introduced as a means of eliminating these negative influences. Finally, the military model is “organizationally primitive” and easy to apply, particularly in institutions lacking developed managerial skills and where many members have prior military experience. Despite these reasons, Bittner argues that the essence of the police function is deeply incompatible with military characteristics. He explains that war against an external enemy cannot be equated with the control of internal social problems. War implies a “will to ruthlessness,” which is undesirable in internal affairs, because crime control conducted in such a manner would itself become criminal.

Barry Friedman (2021), although not explicitly using the term “militarism,” discusses the concept of the “constructed officer of force and law.” Friedman explains that this model is created through recruitment that emphasizes military discipline, while recruitment materials often depict police officers in military-style uniforms and training that is predominantly focused on the use of force and military equipment. At the same time, other skills—such as mediation and social work, which the police need on a daily

basis—are neglected. This approach, Friedman concludes, creates a harmful model in which a “soldier” is sent to resolve complex social problems (homelessness, family conflicts, etc.) for which they are neither trained nor equipped.

From Bittner’s analysis (1970), as well as from the works of other authors (Manning, 2014; Delehanty et al., 2017; Lawson, 2018; Kesić & Zekavica, 2018; Mummolo, 2018; Steidley & Ramey, 2019; Friedman, 2021), a range of harmful consequences of police militarization becomes evident. Perhaps the most significant consequence is the obstruction of professionalism. Military-bureaucratic discipline focuses on internal rules (neat appearance, punctuality, bureaucratic routines) that are unrelated to the actual work of the police within the community. Furthermore, militarism in policing leads to the creation of so-called “perverse incentives.” Combined with pressure to achieve visible results (arrest operations), military discipline encourages police officers to carry out spectacular actions (with the use of intense physical force), rather than performing them in a more sophisticated and less intrusive manner, without compromising the objective. Additionally, militarism weakens the role and responsibility of police leadership. Instead of leading their personnel, supervisors are perceived merely as disciplinary figures capable of inflicting harm but not providing support. In order to secure loyalty, they are compelled to conceal poor practices of their subordinates in dealings with citizens, in exchange for compliance with internal rules of conduct.

Finally, militarism negatively affects police education and training. Training is reduced to learning internal rules rather than acquiring skills for working with citizens. Peter Manning (2014, p. 4520) also criticizes militarism, emphasizing its manifestation in police rhetoric and practice through dress and the dramatization of the police role in the media and in self-promotion, where the police are portrayed as “violent, heavily armed, distant, cold, and mysterious.” Although both the police and the military symbolize sacrifice for the common good, their functions require fundamentally different organizational approaches. Using county-level data from four U.S. states, Delehanty et al. (2017) conclude that there is a direct link between the introduction of military equipment and increased police violence. According to the authors, the introduction of military equipment fosters a “culture of militarization” within the police. This aligns with the psychological phenomenon known as the “law of the instrument,” according to which the availability of weapons and military equipment increases the likelihood that violence will be used as the primary means of problem-solving and task execution.

Similarly, Lawson (2018) finds a positive and statistically significant association between the level of militarization (measured by the value of acquired military equipment) and the number of suspects killed by the police. Put simply, as the level of militarization of a police agency increases, so does the number of fatalities it causes. Analyzing the process of police militarization, Kesić and Zekavica (2018) conclude that although this process may have certain situational advantages, its systemic negative effects far outweigh the positive ones, posing a serious threat to democratic society and the rule of law. Their central argument is that militarization fundamentally changes the character of the police. The police cease to be a service for citizens and transform into a quasi-military organization, while the police officer becomes an “official with a warrior ideology.” The consequence is the weakening of the social function of the police, as well as the crime prevention function. The focus shifts from proactive and

preventive action to reactive and retributive (punitive) functions. Instead of addressing the root causes of problems within the community, the police become an instrument of force, representing a step backward from contemporary policing philosophies.

Mummolo (2018) also addresses the negative effects of police militarization, arguing that this process does not lead to improvements in public security or reductions in crime rates. Moreover, he concludes that militarization—particularly exposure to images of militarized police in the news—can damage the public image of the police and increase citizens' distrust. A similar conclusion is reached by Steidley and Ramey (2019), who argue that although the police support militarization, there is very little evidence that it enhances public safety, while there is growing evidence that it may have harmful consequences, including increased violence and deterioration of police–public relations. Research has also shown that public support for police militarization is complex and context-dependent. In general, support for militarization is higher among men, individuals with lower levels of education, and those who identify as politically conservative. Citizens who are generally more satisfied with police performance and those more concerned about terrorism, drugs, and gangs also tend to support militarization more frequently. Individuals with a university degree, however, demonstrate significantly lower levels of support (Lockwood et al., 2018).

Despite the numerous harmful consequences it may cause, militarism in policing also has certain advantages and may be useful in specific, strictly limited circumstances. A rigid hierarchy and discipline can be effective in securing large public gatherings, suppressing violent demonstrations, or responding to emergency situations such as natural disasters. Furthermore, the deployment of highly trained special units with a military structure is justified, but exclusively in high-risk interventions such as hostage rescue or the arrest of exceptionally dangerous and heavily armed individuals. However, Kesić and Zekavica (2018) emphasize that problems arise when this exception becomes the rule and paramilitary tactics begin to be used in routine police work. Moreover, a high level of police militarization may be useful for the exercise of the defensive function of the police, as discussed in the first part of this paper. In other words, militaristic characteristics of police organizations or their specific units facilitate the integration of the police into the state defense system under non-peacetime conditions. Such organizations can more easily be placed under military command and carry out military tasks.

Conclusion

The defensive function of the police and militarism in policing represent two complex phenomena that are historically, organizationally, and functionally intertwined. As demonstrated in this paper, the defensive function is the only police function that is not permanently active, but is activated in non-peacetime conditions, when the police assume a specific role of supporting the armed forces in the defense of the state. Its implementation requires significant organizational and functional changes and is regulated by strict norms of national and international law that protect its primarily civilian character.

On the other hand, militarism in policing, although rooted in the shared historical genesis of the police and the military, represents a predominantly negative phenomenon in contemporary democratic societies. As emphasized, militarization—through the adoption of military equipment, tactics, and a “warrior mentality”—leads to the erosion of public trust, an increase in the use of force and violence, and the neglect of the preventive and social-service functions of the police. It transforms the police from a service for citizens into a force that confronts the community, which is contrary to the principles of modern policing.

The central insight of this paper lies in the paradoxical relationship between these two concepts. Although militarism is harmful in everyday police work, its characteristics—such as a rigid hierarchy, discipline, and command structure—may facilitate faster and more efficient integration of certain police units into the defense system when such a need arises. A police organization with pronounced militaristic characteristics adapts more easily to the requirements of operating under military command.

Finally, the challenge for every democratic state lies in establishing an appropriate balance. It is necessary to develop the police as a civilian service for citizens, deriving its legitimacy from the trust of the community, and to actively pursue the process of demilitarization under regular conditions. At the same time, through clearly defined legal mechanisms, strategic planning, and training, the state must ensure that the police are prepared to effectively carry out their defensive function in extraordinary circumstances, without permanently undermining their essential nature. Further research into this issue, as well as its adequate treatment within educational programs for police and military personnel, is of crucial importance for understanding and improving the functioning of the overall security system.

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Summary

This paper analyzes two interrelated phenomena: the defensive function of the police and militarism in policing. The aim was, through a review of relevant literature, to highlight the specific characteristics of the defensive function, which is activated exclusively in non-peacetime conditions (a state of war or a state of emergency), and to explore its paradoxical relationship with the phenomenon of militarism in policing. In order to understand the distinctiveness of the defensive function, the paper first presents the other police functions that are constantly active: administrative, criminal, misdemeanor, normative, educational, and social-service functions. Particular emphasis is placed on the social-service dimension, which defines the police as a service for citizens, in contrast to the traditional repressive model.

The defensive function is activated exclusively in non-peacetime conditions, when the police change their mode of operation and adapt their organization and powers, acting in coordination with the military. At that time, their status and activities are regulated by norms of national and international law, which primarily treat the police as a civilian authority, except in cases of the direct incorporation of police units into the armed forces.

Militarism in policing is reflected in the adoption of military equipment, tactics, values, and organizational culture. This phenomenon has deep historical roots, as police and military functions were originally combined within a single authority. The paper identifies four dimensions of militarism: material (weapons and technology), cultural (language and values), organizational (command structure), and operational (military models of action). Numerous studies analyzed in the paper point to the distinctly harmful consequences of militarization under peacetime conditions. These include the deterioration of relations with the community, an increase in police violence, the weakening of the social function of the police, and the erosion of public trust. Militarization transforms the police officer from a “service provider” into a “warrior,” which is contrary to the principles of policing in democratic societies.

However, the central insight of the paper lies in the paradoxical relationship between the two observed phenomena. Although harmful in everyday police work, a certain degree of militarization—manifested in a rigid hierarchy, discipline, and command structure—may facilitate and accelerate the integration of the police into the defense system during non-peacetime conditions. A police organization with more pronounced militaristic characteristics adapts more easily to the requirements of operating under military command when its defensive function is activated. In this sense, the key challenge for contemporary police systems is finding a balance between maintaining a democratic, service-oriented model in peacetime conditions and ensuring effective transformation for the purpose of defending the state in non-peacetime situations. The state must strive for the demilitarization of the police under regular circumstances, while simultaneously, through clear legal mechanisms and training, ensuring police preparedness for the effective exercise of the defensive function when necessary, without permanently undermining the primarily civilian nature of the police.

Keywords: police, function, defense, militarism, military

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