

Report documents pervasive use of excessive force by Border Patrol agents

By Marc Wells
2 November 2015

A report published by the *Los Angeles Times* last Friday exposes hundreds of instances where Taser guns were used by US Customs and Border Protection agents to terrorize, injure and kill immigrants.

The focus of the study is 450 reports from the Department of Homeland Security documenting uses of Tasers between 2010 and 2013. Use-of-force reports showed that at least in 70 cases (documents were redacted by the Obama administration) agents used Tasers in the absence of any danger posed to agents, or as the person was running away.

The results have been brutally violent: at least 3 people died after being tasered, while a 24-year-old man, Alex Martin, burned to death in his car when Border Patrol agents pulled him over, smashed his window and fired a Taser gun inside the vehicle, igniting a gruesome fire.

A 45-year-old man, Jose Gutierrez Guzman, a Mexican native from Los Angeles, was tasered, causing him to fall on his head and suffer permanent brain damage. No agent was prosecuted for any of these crimes.

At least six times, agents tasered people who were climbing over the Mexican border. At least two were hit while handcuffed and at least two were shocked with five cycles, despite a policy setting the maximum at three cycles. At least 86 people were injured in Taser incidents since 2010.

Brutal violence characterizes Border Patrol activity. Last year the American Civil Liberties Union reported that since 2010 at least 28 civilians “died following an encounter with US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) personnel.” All but one died as the result of the use of force. Around a third of the victims were children.

While encounters with Border Patrol are often

described in the media as mutually violent, many are cases of stone throwing being met with firearms and Tasers. Last April, a U.S. Appeals Court cleared a Border Patrol agent after he shot Sergio Adrián Hernández Güereca in the face. The 15-year-old Mexican boy was allegedly throwing rocks.

In 2010 the case of Anastasio Hernández Rojas, a Mexican immigrant construction worker and father of five, provoked anger internationally. The immigrant worker was tasered and beaten to death by 20 Border Patrol agents, according to witnesses, and an internal investigation whitewashed the entire affair.

This is only a small fraction of the real life experiences of thousands of immigrants who have no democratic or constitutional rights. While officials have promoted the use of Taser guns as a “safer” alternative to firearms, Tasers are aimed at increasing state repression, while trying to refurbish the public image of state agencies whose violence has provoked mass revulsion.

CBP’s internal corruption is rampant: last June the Homeland Security Advisory Council published a report, prepared by a commission of law enforcement officials, which gave a tiny glimpse of the abuse.

While the intent of the report was to control the damage caused by agents’ criminal behavior, its findings included the following: “Over the past decade, the number of allegations of corruption involving CBP employees, both Border Patrol Agents and CBP Officers at the ports of entry, may be increasing... Moreover, there is data indicating that arrests for corruption of CBP personnel far exceed, on a per capita basis, such arrests at other federal law enforcement agencies.”

Presiding over this brutal paramilitary operation is the Obama administration. Following the deportation of

children and mothers and the breakup of entire families, a spectacle that disgusted the entire world, Obama sought to advance a new public relations strategy at the end of 2014. From then on, the immigration system was to target criminals, not families, declared the President who promised “change.”

But it was Obama himself who defined every undocumented immigrant as a criminal. Last November, in a national address aimed at concealing his record 2 million-plus deportations, he stated: “Undocumented workers broke our immigration laws, and I believe that they must be held accountable.”

The bullet points of his immigration “reform” include “Cracking Down on Illegal Immigration at the Border,” which resulted in an increased militarization around frontier areas; “Deporting Felons, Not Families,” allegedly aimed at terrorists and violent criminals; and “Accountability—Criminal Background Checks and Taxes,” part of a provision which allows a small portion of undocumented immigrants to avoid deportation for 3 years. The actions of Border Patrol agents track this repressive agenda exactly.

Recent reports provide further evidence of the lies and reactionary record of the Obama administration. A report, “Lives in Peril: How Ineffective Inspections Make ICE Complicit in Immigration Detention Abuse” was released a few days ago by the National Immigrant Justice Center (NIJC) and Detention Watch Network (DWN).

The report reveals how the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) inspections process for immigration detention centers obscures and perpetuates widespread abuses of detained immigrants. Significantly, it exposes the continuity of policy between the Bush and Obama administrations.

As the report notes, “there is no indication that any of the shortcomings identified have changed.” In the last three years alone, “advocates and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to raise complaints of systemic human rights and due process violations in the immigration detention system. In the first nine months of 2015 alone, ICE reported six deaths in detention.”

The detention system, according to the report, includes neglect for the most basic human needs, such as health care, recreation, humane treatment, legal rights access and visitation. The report further notes the

lack of suicide prevention programs and the dismissal of sexual assault claims.

Obama’s “tough” stance against terrorists and violent criminals is a fraud concocted to justify the persecution of immigrant workers. His policy of issuing draconian “detainers”—orders to hold immigrants being released after being apprehended to facilitate ICE’s intervention and deportation—continues to target immigrants who never had any encounter with crime.

An analysis by researchers at Syracuse University of 7,993 detainers issued in April 2015 showed that 67 percent of the people had not been convicted of any crime, while only 19 percent had a felony conviction.

Obama’s record on immigration is not an aberration, but instead part of a policy leading in the direction of a police state. The aim is to defend the wealth of the super-rich and repress the emerging struggles of the working class provoked by the extraordinary levels of social inequality.

This policy unfolds in two directions. Domestic policy includes the increasing militarization of society and US borders, increasing police brutality and attacks on workers’ living standards. Internationally, imperialist foreign policy aims at countering the loss of US global economic supremacy through military might, threatening the world with a global nuclear conflagration.

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