

Militarizing the Police. Activist Had Hands Up When Killed by Georgia Police?

Atlanta is the site of another law-enforcement training center which can only lead to more deaths at the hands of the state

By [Abayomi Azikiwe](#)

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There has been additional information which contradicts the state and local authorities' statements in Atlanta, Georgia where an environmental activist was gunned down by the police.

An independent autopsy requested by the family of the deceased activist announced on March 13 that the victim was in the process of surrendering when shot to death by armed law-enforcement agents.

Cop City is the popular name that has been given to the construction of a training center for police and firefighters in a forest area in Atlanta. It is part and parcel of an enhanced militarization of the police taking place at the aegis of the federal government.

Despite the mass demonstrations across the United States since 2020 against the brutality of law-enforcement, the administration of **President Joe Biden**, after receiving broad electoral support in order to oust his predecessor **Donald Trump**, stated publicly at the State of the Nation Address in 2022 that he did not want to defund the police. Instead Biden called for additional resources for law-enforcement along with more training.

The question is: training to do what? Civilians murdered by law-enforcement are rising at an alarming rate. Anti-crime specialized police units such as the Scorpions in Memphis, Tennessee whose operatives brutally beat to death 29-year-old African American Tyre Nichols in early February, have been established in urban areas in all regions of the U.S.

Attorney General Merrick Garland announced in early March that the Department of Justice had found evidence of racial profiling and abuse in Louisville, Kentucky where 25-year-old Breonna Taylor was killed by police conducting a no-knock raid. The police had the wrong residence and would shoot Taylor to death while lying in her bed. Although this

incident occurred three years ago, no one has been indicted in her murder.

With specific reference to the struggles surrounding the construction of Cop City in Atlanta, the Associated Press and Fox News [reported on the situation saying](#):

“According to the law enforcement narrative, (Manuel Esteban Paez) Teran was inside a tent in Intrenchment Creek Park during the January raid. The official autopsy conducted by the DeKalb County Medical Examiner’s Office said Teran was shot 13 times by multiple different guns. The family’s independent autopsy report concluded Teran’s hands were raised and facing multiple individuals at the time of the shooting.... The family filed a lawsuit last week against the city of Atlanta under the Georgia Open Records Act. The suit alleges the Georgia Bureau of Investigation asked the Atlanta Police Department to not release further body camera video from that operation, as originally promised, leaving the family no option but to file suit in an attempt to get to the truth. ‘The only people who know what happened in the forest that day are the officers who were present and the GBI, who is investigating,’ (Jeff) Filipovits, a civil rights lawyer representing the family said.”

The GBI has stated that there is no police bodycam video of the actual shooting of Teran, known by his friends and comrades as Tortuguita. Georgia officials claim that in this particular case there was no requirement to wear recording equipment.



All indications are that a massive cover-up by the State of Georgia, the City of Atlanta and various law-enforcement agencies is well underway. The withholding of pertinent information by the GBI and the governmental entities is being justified by the state through evoking the notion of not compromising the investigation.

Nonetheless, the interest of the public in the case must factor into these decisions. Distrust and skepticism of law-enforcement agencies is accelerating as the brutality of the police remains a major concern for people within the African American, Latin American and other People of Color communities.

Protesters Attacked by Police

Demonstrations have been ongoing against the construction of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center (Cop City). Activists are demanding the halting of the project along with justice for the family of Tortuguita.

The facility is said to cost \$90 million and is being supported by both public and private funds. A police foundation connected with the project has accepted donations from wealthy

individuals and interests in the Atlanta area. Corporations with financial interests in Cop City include Delta, Waffle House, the Home Depot, Georgia Pacific, Equifax, Carter, Accenture, Wells Fargo and UPS.

Cop City is being built on 85 acres (34.4 hectares) of a 400-acre property of what is designated as an unincorporated area in DeKalb County. The property is owned by the City of Atlanta. The training center is located within the larger South River Forest, which is also known as the Weelaunee Forest, a territory of the Indigenous Creek Nation.

This may explain the support for the Cop City training center among the municipal government in Atlanta. The Republican and Democratic politicians are heavily invested in the expansion of such training facilities which link local, state and federal law-enforcement agencies. According to activists opposed to the project, the overwhelming majority of people in the Atlanta and DeKalb County communities are against the construction of Cop City.

Although within the municipal governance authorities, the City Council majority voted to move ahead with the construction irrespective of public opposition. Atlanta **Mayor Andre Dickens** on January 31 announced a supposed “compromise” aimed at protecting the environment while granting a permit for the final construction. His actions have been condemned by environmentalists and anti-police brutality organizers.

Demonstrations were held in Atlanta on March 5 where 23 people were arrested and charged with terrorism. The police are alleging that they were attacked without provocation. However, activists deny these assertions by the police and state officials.

The clashes on March 5 took place while a concert was being held as part of a week of action in the DeKalb County area and in other cities around the U.S. Demonstrations in solidarity with the struggle to save the forest and end the militarization of the police have occurred in numerous cities in the U.S. and Canada.

[Another Associated Press report](#) on the events of March 5 emphasized:

“On Sunday, Atlanta Police Chief Darin Schierbaum said at a midnight news conference, pieces of construction equipment were set on fire in what he called ‘a coordinated attack’ at the site for the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center in DeKalb County. Surveillance video released by police shows a piece of heavy equipment in flames. It was among several destroyed pieces of construction gear, police said. Protesters also threw rocks, bricks, Molotov cocktails, and fireworks at police, officials said. In addition, demonstrators tried to blind officers by shining green lasers into their eyes, and used tires and debris to block a road, the Georgia Department of Public Safety said Monday (March 6).”

Convictions under terrorism laws would carry severe prison terms without the possibility of parole. Even in the situation of a first-time offender, the possibility of leniency is ruled out by law.

The Role of the Federal Government in Militarizing the Police

There have been periodic investigations by the Justice Department into criminal activity and civil rights violations by police operating within oppressed communities. As in Louisville, the interventions by the Attorney General always comes after an horrendous killing such as what happened to Breonna Taylor in 2020.

At the same time, funding and logistical efforts are continuing in support of local police agencies nationally. Military equipment utilized in war zones outside the U.S. are supplied to law-enforcement departments ostensibly to fight crime and violent unrest.

This ongoing role of the federal government was further exposed during the demonstrations which sprung up in the aftermath of the police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd three years ago. Hence the strong emphasis on defunding and restructuring the police.

[A report published by National Public Radio](#) in June 2020 on this issue said the following:

“Federal departments ranging from the Department of Justice to the Department of Agriculture have grant programs aimed at hiring more police, equipping them and constructing new police facilities. Some experts say that federal involvement undermines community accountability and focuses more on enforcement than minimizing harm. Probably the most well-known of all such initiatives is the Community Oriented Policing Services program, established as part of the 1994 crime bill. The Department of Justice, which oversees the COPS program, says it has provided \$14 billion since its inception to hire and train local police involved in community policing.”

Therefore, communities around the U.S. should pressure Republican and Democratic administrations in Washington to end their funding of law-enforcement which only results in abuse, unwarranted injuries and deaths due to the entire process of militarization. Prosecutors and the courts often exonerate the police when they engage in abusive behavior.

What is required is a complete break with the character and structures of law-enforcement as it is known today. More resources should be directed towards ending poverty, environmental degradation and the neglect of the needs of working class and oppressed peoples that are the victims of aggressive policing and draconian sentencing guidelines that entrap the masses within the criminal-industrial-complex.

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Abayomi Azikiwe is the editor of the *Pan-African News Wire*. He is a regular contributor to *Global Research*.

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Articles by: **Abayomi**
Azikiwe

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