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Bureau Of Prisons Special Tactical Force Under Scrutiny For Use In DC Protests And Training Mishaps

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When federal prisons experience unrest among inmates, they dispatch special tactical teams to subdue them. The Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP) has a Special Operations Response Teams (SORT) located in different prisons around the country that can be summoned to quell prison riots, most of which are associated with high security prisons and violent inmates. The [history of SWOT dates](#) back to the riots and [hostage situations](#) at the U.S. Penitentiary in Atlanta and the Federal Correctional Institution in Oakdale, La., in November 1987.





Police face off with demonstrators, minutes before curfew, near the White House to protest the death ... [+] AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

BOP institutions maintain their own SORTs, which typically consist of 15 team members, led by a commander. Each year, SORT members are required to meet qualification guidelines issued by the BOP's Office of Emergency Preparedness (OEP), and part of that is a physical training exercise where they replicate real-life situations the team may encounter.

SORT operates under a strict criteria of how and when to use force in its actions. According to an [Office Of Inspector General report](#), SWOT, under the authorization of a Lieutenant or higher ranking Correctional Services Official "... must supervise a calculated use of force and use of Oleoresin Capsicum (OC), Chemical agents, Distraction Devices, Specialty Impact Munitions, and Less Than Lethal delivery systems." However, the OIG concluded that the guidelines established by the BOP did not address the appropriateness of the use of force during its own training exercises ... which lead to a few bad incidents.

According to the an [OIG report issued on June 17, 2020](#), during a SORT mock exercise, the SORT deployed two "flash bang" type munitions to enter the location of the exercise. One those hit a BOP staff member role player and detonated, causing significant injury requiring surgery and ongoing treatment. The BOP subsequently determined that the particular flash bang deployed during the exercise was not an authorized distraction device munition listed in BOP policy. After the incident, the BOP issued guidance prohibiting the use of this device in future mock exercises.

In another incident, BOP administrative staff members who were not involved in the mock exercise due to medical conditions that prohibited them from participating, secured themselves in a business office to stay out of the way of the SWOT exercise. However, during the exercise, SORT members beat on the door and started screaming at the BOP staff who had locked themselves in the room to stay away from the tactical exercise. SORT, believing that the situation was part of the exercise, breached the room using a crow bar and then sprayed the unprotected BOP staff with pepper spray, and started shooting stinging paintballs rounds from their automatic weapons. According to OIG's report of the incident, a fight ensued between SORT and the BOP staff who were in the room who finally brought the situation under control by yelling, "We're out of role. We're out of role!"

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The OIG's conclusion, again this report came out this month, was that, "... the BOP has inadequate policies governing mock exercises." So with that, why not swing SWOT into action on the front lines of the White House?

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On Monday, June 1, Park Police, National Guard and members of the Federal Bureau of Prisons SWOT, surrounded the White House [at the request](#) of U.S. Attorney General William Barr. Because of the national unrest associated with the [death of George Floyd](#), the potential for unrest in prisons and the deployment of SWOT away from prison settings, inmates were put on lock down at every federal institution in the country.



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Now, Congress wants to have more information on the use of SWOT at the White House and the exposure the tactical team had to thousands who were protesting outside the White House. In a [letter to BOP Director Michael Carvajal](#), Congress asked if members of BOP's SWOT were going to be tested and quarantined as a result of their participation in addressing national protests in both Washington and Miami. The concern comes from notification that members of DC National Guard who responded to the protests had tested positive for COVID-19. The letter specifically stated that, "federal inmates are being disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and BOP officers appear **not** to have taken recommended precautions to prevent spread of the virus," by not wearing masks and obviously not social

distancing. The BOP has been asked to provide information on whether any of the SWOT tested positive or if they went through a quarantine period.

According to Jack Donson, who worked at the BOP for 23 years as a corrections treatment specialist, “My sources tell me that SORT teams deployed had to undergo a two week quarantine at home upon returning from duty and must have a negative COVID test before return to work.”

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