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Police across the country facing career-ending criminal charges for split-second life or death decisions

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2020 was a wild ride – especially for law enforcement. After the George Floyd incident sparked protests all over the country, more spotlight has been put on police.

As public pressure is mounting on government officials, many opportunistic politicians are on a witch-hunt to sacrifice any police officer. What civilians, politicians and even celebrities don't understand, are the complexities of law enforcement.

Police officers are often put in a position where they have to make a split-second decision with limited information and a lot at stake.

When a suspect is ignoring lawful commands and starts acting unpredictably, the officer starts thinking: What is the suspect's intent? What is he capable of? What is he doing with his hands? The questions go on and on. The officer is asking and answering these questions in a matter of seconds and has to make a decision within that time frame.

Not an easy task. Best case scenario is your decision was favorable in the eyes of the department and the public. Worst case scenario is the decision will be scrutinized closely and political pressure will mount to pursue criminal charges.

Only few know the split-second decision scenario better than Army First Lieutenant Clint Lorange.

In 2014, Clint was deployed to Afghanistan as a Platoon Leader of an Army infantry combat unit. During a routine patrol in an area of Kandahar province known for IED's (improvised explosive devices) and random attacks on U.S. forces, Clint ran into a situation.

Several Afghan motorcyclists approached his platoon and they ignored orders to stop. He was faced with a split-second decision.

Clint tells LET:

“During those few seconds I had to decide, I was thinking about the intelligence reports that I was very familiar with and how the Taliban would place C-4 explosives under the seat of the motorcycle in such a way you couldn't even see it.”

Clint gave the order to fire, and two of the motorcyclists were killed. The military disagreed with the decision and subsequently charged and convicted him with ‘unpremeditated murder’ and sentenced to twenty years in Leavenworth.

The case was later picked up by United American Patriots, UAP.org, who advocates on behalf of servicemen and women who are wrongfully imprisoned by providing free legal services. And after mounting evidence supporting Clint's case was exposed by UAP (such



as bomb-making residue found on the motorcyclists hands), Clint was pardoned by President Trump late 2019.

His story was re-told in a Starz documentary entitled Leavenworth.

There were a lot of parallels when it came to Clint's case and those among police officers Use of Force incidents becoming politicized. Clint feels he was a scapegoat for military's upper brass looking to charge servicemen and women to appease politicians.

Clint said:

“Senators often put pressure on the Pentagon to push political agendas. When it comes time for a General's promotion and it goes to a Senate confirmation hearing, Senators have the authority to say ‘No’.”

Sound familiar? That's like a mayor putting pressure on a DA to pursue criminal charges against an officer to appease the public to secure votes. Meanwhile, due process and the law take a backseat. That's as un-American as it gets.

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Clint said:

“I had a duty to react because if I didn't, I could've been sending soldiers home in a body bag. That's the thing with war; you have to know what the enemy could potentially do.”

And law enforcement officers know what suspects could potentially do, which leads to split second decisions. Many civilians and politicians expect an officer to make the best possible decision every single time- which is unrealistic.

Furthermore, the idea that many departments nationwide are instituting a 'civilian oversight' committee as law enforcement watchdogs are both futile and irresponsible. Civilians simply don't understand the dynamics of split second decisions when deadly use of force is a real possibility.

If you ever find yourself in a political tug-of-war, as several officers have in the last year, know your rights and put yourself in a favorable position.

Clint said:

“Don’t say anything to anyone other than your PBA rep. Also, if I could go back, I would sell everything I own and get a better attorney.”

Of course every case is different. And it all starts with understanding what role politics play when it comes to criminal charges and Use of Force. It’s a shame that we have to look at it that way- but that’s the reality we are in.

Or, you could actually do something about it, as Clint is.

Clint said:

“I enrolled in law school to be a part of the solution. Too many politicians push their own agendas and justice gets moved aside and that’s crap!”

He continues:

“Charging the people (police) who carry the heaviest burdens in our society must be a fair and objective process.”

If an officer is charged with a crime, it should be based on facts and laws. Then the officer should face the consequences fairly in accordance with due process- not politics.

About the writer:

Eddie Molina is a leadership professional, blogger and author. He voluntarily writes articles to keep the law enforcement, first responder and military community informed on important issues. For more information go to www.eddiemolina.com