

J. David Goodman  
Pool report #2 – equipment tour

After a Monday afternoon news conference in a sun-speckled plaza outside Police Headquarters to address security preparations for Pope Francis's visit to New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio toured an array of Police Department equipment staged just behind the podium.

"Our tour guides," Mr. de Blasio said of two chiefs, Harry Wedin and Vincent Giordano, who escorted the mayor.

Five trucks, including a massive bomb squad command center and an all-black armored vehicle known as a BearCat.

Two brand new sport utility vehicles emblazoned with the acronym of a new police unit, the Strategic Response Group, whose roughly 800 specialized counterterrorism officers are trained to use the sorts of long guns on display on Monday.

Two horses.

Two dogs.

A bomb disposal robot.

And several officers to explain their roles to the curious mayor.

"High tech and old school at the same time," said Mr. Bratton.

Lieutenant Mark Torre, the commanding officer of the bomb squad, explained how the articulated arm of the robot worked to tear open packages or deal with a potential bomb.

"We can remotely conduct an operation," he said. "It does a lot but it can't do what these guys do," he added, speaking of two of his officers who stood by the bomb squad truck.

"The human element still matters," said Mr. de Blasio.

"Yes sir, very much so," said Lieutenant Torre.

"Amen," said Mr. de Blasio.

From there it was over to the bomb-sniffing dogs, Stryker, 5, and Nox, 3. Mr. Bratton bent to pet both dogs as he passed.

"How many weeks or months does it take to train dogs like these?" the mayor asked.

"Fifteen months," one of the officers responded, "and another three months for explosives."

"That's amazing," the mayor said.

As the mayor listened to information about the dogs, the head of the New York field office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Diego Rodriguez, asked to pet one of them, and then did so.

Among the last items on display were several long guns, which sat in their secured in storage drawers, pulled open for display, within the sport utility vehicles. Above sat a pair of helmets and protective vests. Mayor de Blasio picked up one of the helmets, turning it in his hands before placing it back in the vehicle.

Mr. Bratton explained to the mayor that the purpose of the new unit, in part, was to ensure that the Police Department "were not outgunned from the get go" as he said French police officers were during the attack in Paris earlier this year.

“Impressive, impressive. All around,” the mayor said to the assembled group as the roughly 19-minute tour concluded. “I think you guys are ready. I think you’re damn ready. Very, very impressive.”