



# Partnerships, information and public safety

## Community policing in a time of terror

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**Abstract** *Congress has expressed concern that the Homeland Security agency might lack the power necessary to prevent future terrorist attacks. This paper argues that it is less likely to be a lack of police power and more likely the misapplication of those powers that undermines the war on terror. Until one learns to police in ways that build trust within those communities least likely to willingly assist the police, no amount of additional funding or legal authority will increase the capacity of the police forces to gather the information needed. For neighborhood policing this means partnering with those most victimized by crime. For the war on terror, this means partnering with Arab-American communities. This examination of partnerships provides a basis for understanding how likely it is that current neighborhood policing practices will support a successful war on terror.*

### Introduction

Seventeen days after hijacked planes destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, *The New York Times* reported that President Bush had decided to create a Homeland Security Council, “with powers to match those of the National Security Council”:

White House officials have also decided to create a homeland defense command within the military despite years of criticism from civil rights groups that a military assigned to protect the country could easily be transformed into a super police force (Becker and Weiner, 2001).

We call it a “war on terror”, even as we hope that it will not repeat the failures of recent wars on crime and drugs (Donzinger, 1996; Tonry, 1995). Members of Congress, while praising the President’s initiative, have expressed concern that the new agency might lack the power necessary to prevent future terrorist attacks, because the government responds well to emergencies, but has a less than impressive track record “in intelligence gathering” (Becker and Weiner, 2001). This paper argues that it is less likely to be a lack of police power that will derail our national efforts to live free from terror and more likely the continued misapplication of those powers. More specifically, until we learn to police in ways that build trusting relationships with those communities least likely to willingly assist the police – those often marginalized communities where criminals or terrorists can more easily live lives insulated from observation – no amount of additional funding or legal authority, consistent with living in a free society, will increase the capacity of our police forces to gather the crime and terror-related information we desperately need.



The challenges to be faced in this war on terror are numerous and frustratingly interconnected. Addressing these challenges will mean many changes in the ways we live our lives, some welcome, others not. As a people we have been shaken from our consumerist complacency, as the uncertainty and violence that routinely penetrate the public and private spheres of others now cast a shadow over the US experiment. We will face many difficult choices in the weeks, months, and years ahead. Some of our leaders will mislead us, by placing their “usual suspects” on our enemies list or filling our solutions list with “off-the-shelf” policy preferences they could not sell without a crisis atmosphere. Others will rise above the moment and lead, seeing beyond partisan advantage and helping us define a new century, where we might all live free from fear. While many things will change, not the least of these will be changes within law enforcement. In this article it is desired to consider how ongoing changes within law enforcement – loosely referred to as community policing – might interact with the larger changes constitutive of the emerging war on terror.

A war on terror is likely to place new and powerful pressures on local police forces. These pressures will encourage local police to continue expanding their collaborative efforts with state and federal law enforcement agencies, perhaps most importantly in the areas of information sharing, crime analysis, and paramilitary task forces. Some of these developments will strengthen efforts to implement community policing, but some are likely to push local law enforcement in para-military directions (Kraska, 2001). Our experience with the development of inter-agency collaboration to date has been profoundly mixed, often encouraging officers to acquire skills that increase their professional insulation from the communities with which we seek them to partner and to forgo the skill development needed to reinvent police forces capable of working with genuinely reciprocal citizen partnerships (Kraska, 1993; Lyons, 1999).

A war on terror may also create the kind of foreseeably disparate and destructive impact on our most victimized communities that Tonry (1995) identified as operationally indefensible in the war on drugs and Beckett (1997) demonstrated to be more about electoral gain than effective police work. Terrorism is a complex phenomenon. But one thing is likely: to the degree that our response to terrorism encourages us to police in ways that diminish our civil, political or economic liberties, we can expect that the burden of this decision will not be evenly distributed and will support more divisive politics at a time when we desperately need more cooperation. And these impacts on policing might also signal a sought-after success for our terrorist adversaries:

By itself, terror can accomplish nothing in terms of political goals; it can only aim at obtaining a response that will achieve those goals for it (Fromkin, as cited in Barghothi, 1996).

Terrorists seek to catalyze precisely these kinds of responses from their target governments in the hope that counter-terror and the curtailment of liberties will divide the nation, amplifying public fears by revealing the target government

as unable to protect its own citizens from either external attack or internal repression by our own police forces (Barghothi, 1996).

While a war on terror can be expected to impact police work in many of these ways, the focus of this paper is on how one well-documented failure in our implementation of community policing – one that still remains to be seriously addressed by police departments – might also weaken our ability to fight terror. Community-police partnerships work best when they are structured to encourage information sharing, composed of citizens from those communities often least willing to assist the police, and actively encourage citizen participation at all stages of the neighborhood problem-solving process. This is well established in the literature, but not in police practice. In fact, the best work on community-policing partnerships to date (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997; Skogan, 1990; Lyons, 1999) makes it clear that the police are partnering with those communities least likely to have the crime or terror-related information they seek, though more likely to support police efforts to define community policing as simply a more aggressive and less accountable reinvention of professional policing (Lyons, 1999). It is this information gap – one consequence of how we police – that this paper is concerned to examine. More reciprocal partnerships are not simply consistent with our proud democratic traditions of citizen participation; they are also a still vastly underdeveloped resource for effective police work and to continue to overlook these may contribute to weakening our efforts to combat terror and other threats to liberty.

There will be many points of intersection between local police work and a war on terror, but what is focused on here is that where we have less than an impressive track record: information gathering. A successful war on terror depends on information. The successful implementation of community policing also highlights the importance of enhancing our ability to gather information (Rosenbaum, 1994). Professional police practices (officer rotation, rapid response, random preventive patrol), designed to prevent corruption, had the unexpected consequence of reducing citizen trust and, thereby, restricting officer access to crime-related information (Kelling and Moore, 1988; Williams and Murphy, 1990; Fogelson, 1977; Barak, 1994). Police-community partnerships are expected to rebuild citizen trust, mobilize the latent informal mechanisms of social control that will enable communities to contribute to public safety, and increase police access to the critical information embedded within local communities (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Greene and Mastrofski, 1988).

Logically, this means partnering with those citizens who have the information we need: primarily the law-abiding residents of poor and minority, inner-city neighborhoods. For the war on terror, this will similarly mean rebuilding trust with Arab-American and Islamic-American communities, not with empty promises but in the ways we police and protect them in their neighborhoods, workplaces and places of worship, airports and other public spaces[1]. To effectively partner with these communities means to police and

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protect them in all these areas, to do so in ways that respond to their concerns as they understand and articulate them, demonstrating our respect for their law-abiding ways of life. Absent this broader understanding of partnership, we should not expect them to willingly assist the police by providing crime- or terror-related information. In this sense, an examination of how well we have already done in implementing with similarly marginalized communities the more narrow police-community partnerships constitutive of community policing to date will provide a lens for understanding how likely it is that the ways we police our neighborhoods are effective enough to support the information-gathering aspects of a successful war on terror[2].

A recent analysis of the relationship between community building and the willingness of citizens to work with government officials found that citizen willingness to assist the police and the information associated with it “depend[s] on improved cooperation and communication between citizens and police” (Glaser *et al.*, 2001, p. 97). Hahn (1971) found that those citizens who distrust the police are far less likely to assist the police or cooperate with police efforts – and in the context of community policing this means less likely to join police community partnerships and share information.

An examination of Seattle and Chicago data here reveals, consistent with findings in other cities (see an analysis of eight cities in Sadd and Grinc (1994) and an analysis of six cities in Lamm-Weisel and Eck (1994), both conducted for the NIJ), that we are not partnering with the communities that have the information we need, that communication patterns in existing partnerships do not encourage access to additional sources of information and, as a result, we should expect that the interaction of the war on terror and community policing will lead to a more rapid federalization of crime control without a commensurate increase in our capacities to fight crime or terror. If we want to make ourselves safer from the spread of international terror, it turns out, we need to do a better job building more reciprocal partnerships with our more marginalized communities at home. To win this war against terror, we may need to win the war against concentrated disadvantage that plagues our inner-city communities.

### **Seattle: reciprocal partnerships increase access to information**

Community policing in Seattle began in the diverse south-eastern neighborhoods of Rainier Valley[3]. In the 1970s and 1980s, progress was made and successes achieved long before citizens persuaded the Seattle Police Department to agree in 1988 to establish a partnership that the National Institute of Justice later called a model for community policing. The success can be traced to the long-term activism of its residents, targeting a broad range of citizen concerns – from crime to redlining to police power. Success in the neighborhoods, overcoming resistance from the police chief, not only reduced crime but also contributed to the broader revitalization of communities, a strong partnership, and catalyzed the hiring of a progressive police chief

willing to reach out to precisely those communities with the information needed to improve police effectiveness.

The partnership maintained a relatively reciprocal relationship with the police department for nearly 18 months. Targets were jointly selected and jointly monitored. The precinct captain reported directly to the group (weekly at first), with an equally detailed report – often critical of the police – submitted by the citizen partner responsible for each target. But this remarkable degree of information sharing and mutual respect did not last. Long-time activist members moved on to other tasks and their replacements could not command an equivalent respect. Precinct captain briefings on jointly selected targets evolved into appearances by civilian bureaucrats to solicit support for police funding requests[4]. As one of the early community activists described it, the council meetings evolved from a somewhat contentious, but respectful, engaged, and focused partnership between precinct officers and neighborhood residents into a bland, one-sided, impersonal opportunity for city bureaucrats to manufacture consent:

It got to the point where every time I would go to a meeting I would count the people sitting at the table and everybody sitting there was being paid to be there. They were all pumped up about how much money they were getting and everything they were doing was nothing[5].

Citizen partners became increasingly silent in meeting discussions, and the non-white membership on the partnership, which was never high, fell further. Other activists and police officers expressed reservations about a white business bias in the partnership[6]. The composition and activities of the partnership deterred participation from those citizens with the information police needed most. No recognized leader of any African-American community joined the partnership. When asked about this, one of the city's prominent black ministers said:

The African-American community is reluctant to talk about increasing policing, because we have police on every street corner as it is . . . The crime prevention councils serve more to justify police actions and act more as agents of the city than agents of the community[7].

The representative nature of the partnership – and thus its ability to build the trust needed to gain access to crime-related information – was further compromised, when members of other community groups, who had been central to the successes that lead to the creation of the partnership, did not feel welcome on the council[8]. The founder of one of these groups told me that he attended initial partnership meetings but, when he explained that the council could not be effective without a more representative membership, he was ignored and stopped attending the meetings[9]. When I asked the founder of Mothers Against Police Harassment about the participation of her group at partnership meetings, she confirmed that they had been invited, but added that the people at those meetings:

Don't see any problems with the police . . . and most of these councils were set up by the police anyway. They are an arm or tool of the police department[10].

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When the police department was willing to share information with its early partners there was a brief period of high productivity and promise associated with partnership activities. But this promise led to atrophy and the exclusion of other, active community groups in the area and, as the partnership itself became less and less reciprocal and representative, even its initially high capacity to increase police access to information diminished significantly, leaving the partnership as more a public relations effort by the department to manage political participation than an operationally significant contribution to more effective police work (Lyons, 1999).

### **Chicago: limited partnerships limit access to information**

Studies of community policing in Chicago show a second obstacle to partnerships that increase our access to information: citizen involvement that is systematically limited to problem identification (CCPEC, 1997, p. 93; Skogan and Hartnett, 1997, p. 120). Citizens were not invited to analyze the problems, develop responses, or assess the success of problem-solving efforts. Studies of community policing in Seattle and other cities have reported similar findings (Lyons, 1999; Sadd and Grinc, 1994; Skogan, 1994, 1995). The few times that Chicago or Seattle communities were able to construct a more comprehensive approach to community policing, these were limited to those affluent communities able to bring significant private resources to the table and even these successes were of limited duration.

Skogan and Hartnett (1997, pp. 120-7) document that the partnerships in Chicago raised 1,079 problems in an 18-month period from April 1993 through October 1994. While citizens raised nearly all the problems, nearly all solutions were suggested by the police and implemented without citizen participation. A total of 15 per cent of the problems raised identified concerns about police performance, 5 per cent involved police-citizen communication, and 3 per cent raised concerns about getting the community policing program going in Chicago (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997, p. 122). This means that citizens ranked concerns about police agency (22 per cent) third and very nearly as high as concerns about gangs (28 per cent) and physical decay in the neighborhood (23 per cent):

Citizens tended to put greater emphasis on the need for neighborhoods to get organized, and for acting themselves on local problems, rather than depending on outside help; self-help encompassed 41 per cent of solutions offered by residents, compared with 8 per cent of those proposed by police. Conversely, police put more emphasis on . . . traditional solutions that emphasized police action, rather than non-traditional solutions that emphasized community participation (Skogan and Hartnett, 1997, p. 126).

In a context where partnerships are precluded from addressing primary citizen concerns (in this case concerns about police performance), we would be naïve to expect that the partnership will encourage the kind of participation that will increase police access to previously unavailable information in target communities. In fact, current partnerships limit the community's role in ways that discourage the participation of those with access to this additional

information. Participation of the more affluent was encouraged by partnerships that were operationally limited to responding to crime with a more aggressive deployment of existing professional policing tactics and precluded from addressing citizen concerns about police agency.

The lesson from Chicago and Seattle is not that community policing is merely public relations, but that partnerships succeed when they are more reciprocal and representative. In those Chicago partnerships with greater success information was shared and officers regularly engaged with citizens in the community. Those partnerships that failed constructed community policing as merely public relations. They eschewed innovation, did not share information, and relied heavily on pre-existing aggressive law enforcement tactics. They paid “little attention to the residents’ concerns” (CCPEC, 1997, pp. 107-26), failed to develop innovative approaches to crime, and gained little access to additional information, while the department invested heavily in public relations efforts, suggesting otherwise (CCPEC, 1997, p. 2).

### **Policy implications**

When professional bureaucracies replaced party machines, the capacity of city leaders to manage political participation was truncated: bureaucracies manage service delivery, but they neither organize political participation nor link political support to the distributional expectations of urban residents as machines did (Katznelson, 1976). The need to mobilize support, however, has not disappeared and is now central to waging a successful war on terror. In the absence of a strong neighborhood ward system, campaign rhetoric provides an alternative mobilization mechanism. If the argument presented here is persuasive, it is possible that community policing partnerships are evolving less in response to immediate operational concerns about information and more in response to an ongoing political need to manage citizen participation, becoming a neighborhood mechanism to selectively organize citizen support for a particular distribution of resources – including a distribution of non-negotiably coercive force (Bittner, 1980) – that “fits our (current) social and cultural configuration” (Garland, 1996, p. 462) and enables leaders to better “manage the consequences of their inability to solve urban problems” (Katznelson, 1976, p. 220) and provide public safety.

We already have a track record of fighting terrorism (and crime) in ways that are more responsive to electoral calculations and racial bias than to the kind of open communication, due process, and respect necessary for genuine, effective partnerships (Whidden, 2001; Tonry, 1995). Policing that relies upon exclusion, profiling, and secret trials may be politically popular and expedient, but we should not expect these practices to increase our access to information. These make it more difficult for citizens in those communities with the information we seek to communicate effectively crime- or terror-related information, and thereby discourage their willingness to work with the police. Since it is precisely this information, embedded within these communities, that the police seek, in this context it is not likely to be forthcoming. Worse yet,

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responsibility for any future failures will be laid on the police, further damaging morale, effectiveness, and police-community relations, while the leaders who ought to be held responsible for the trumping of operational with electoral concerns will likely be re-elected.

The power imbalances institutionalized in current police-community partnerships are only one manifestation of larger failure of political leadership to invest in resilient communities capable of genuinely co-producing public safety (Bayley, 1988). The structure and composition of current partnerships have become obstacles to mobilizing the latent informal social controls Wilson and Kelling (1982) celebrate and, as such, these decrease police access to the crime-related information embedded within communities. In pre-emptively excluding some citizen concerns and then favoring more aggressive deployment of existing professional police tactics as the response to community concerns, current partnerships retell a familiar story about more powerful communities using the police to control and manage power-poor communities (Cole, 1999; Fogelson, 1977; Williams and Murphy, 1990; Altshuler, 1970). Taken together, these provide an explanatory context for the failure of community policing to date to measurably improve the quality of life for those communities most victimized by crime[11].

A central obstacle to the more reciprocal partnerships needed for pragmatic reasons is that the trend toward selective partnerships with the white, business community appears to have a powerful political utility, outweighing operational efforts to increase police access to information. Current partnerships justify a more aggressive police presence in those communities least able to hold the police accountable and reinforce the geographic targeting of power-poor communities in response to the politically amplified fears of more affluent communities. In this context, partnerships blur the distinction between neighborhood communities empowered to police themselves, and powerful political communities willing to finance a more aggressive, professional policing of others. As such, a sober understanding of the promise and current limitations in partnerships presents us with a political as well as criminological challenge.

A full examination of the political forces pushing and pulling the development of community policing is beyond the scope of this paper, but thinking of partnerships in this context does suggest at least three policy implications. First, effective community policing strengthens those communities most victimized by crime by rebuilding the trust that is the basis for police-citizen cooperation and information sharing through partnerships that are more reciprocal. Cooperation with the police cannot be a precondition for being treated as a citizen. If we expect Arab-Americans and Islamic-Americans to share information, perhaps at great personal risk, it is incumbent on us to insist that our policing efforts first treat them with respect, protecting their liberties and dignity as zealously as those of other Americans, to lay a foundation for their willing cooperation. This is not only the right thing to do; it is also the most pragmatic and operationally prudent way to gain long-term

access to the information we need to fight crime and terror. The insight is not new, but events compel us to act on it.

Second, effective community policing encourages ongoing community input in all stages of the problem-solving process: problem identification, analysis, developing appropriate responses, and evaluating partnership efforts. By encouraging information sharing and more reciprocal relationships with those communities most victimized by crime police can establish the long-term foundation for community support and ongoing access to information. Demanding information as a duty of citizen-patriots without making it clear in police work that these citizen-patriots are valued members of our society independent of our immediate need for their assistance might get a president elected or increase funding for homeland security, but any cooperation that results will be more public performance than sustainable information gathering as a foundation for effective police work. We simply cannot continue to govern and police in ways that privilege the social positions of some communities and expect – in an atmosphere charged with ethnic and religious intolerance – the remaining communities to willingly, actively and patriotically assist in their own subordination. At least not if we expect access to the information embedded within these communities.

Current US attitudes and actions toward Muslims are too inconsistent – too fascinated with Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis – to generate the trust and respect needed to support cooperation based on mutual respect (Israeli, 2000; Fox, 2001). Commonly articulated fears about a putative Muslim inability to integrate into US society in a trustworthy way are inconsistent with data on actual immigration patterns and practices. In fact, Werbner (2000) argues, on the basis of a study of Muslim immigration to the West, that the presence of Muslims has already provided an opportunity to revive and enrich traditional Western notions of civic consciousness and citizenship. The police cannot rewrite public opinion; but police practice can focus on the kinds of partnerships that can reasonably be expected to improve our access to information – even if these practices can be seen as being contrary to prevailing public opinion.

One very real cost of our failure to take full advantage of this opportunity can be seen in ongoing armed conflict in the Philippines (Cline, 2000) or other Muslim separatist struggles in South-east Asia (Tan, 2000), conflicts that are festering and escalating due in part to government failures to recognize and respect ethnic, regional and religious differences and instead focusing on ineffective counter-terrorist measures, encouraging rather than reducing mistrust. Effective partnerships – facing neighborhood, regional, national or international conflicts – only produce the desired forms of cooperation when they operate as a mechanism to increase understanding, trust and respect among the parties that can serve as a sustainable basis for effective action (see Blank (2000) on related problems with US-Russian partnerships).

Finally, effective community policing encourages police and political leaders to accept their civic responsibility to address the full range of concerns they

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hear from citizen partners. Collaboration with other city agencies to stop redlining, improve housing, enhance code enforcement, or bring other resources to bear on strengthening those communities most victimized by crime will all increase the willingness of these particular citizens to assist the police, and to co-produce public safety by joining active and reciprocal partnerships. In an effective war on terror, a police willingness to address citizen concerns must, therefore, include – for pragmatic reasons – the concerns of Islamic women about intrusive strip searches on the basis of religious profiling, the concerns of Arab-American shop-owners about their civil, political and economic liberties, Islamic-American concerns about their religious liberty, and the concerns of any American about the police themselves. To police in these ways builds trust, encourages cooperation, and elicits information – enhancing our neighborhood and national safety in a time of terror.

### Notes

1. While there is no doubt that the unique characteristic of Arab-American communities will present police with particular information-gathering challenges, it is perhaps more likely that their shared character as often marginalized communities, where individuals can insulate themselves from the main stream of US society, is the more compelling analytical starting-point. Exclusion on the basis of ethnicity or religion is a frequently defining characteristic of communities and it is precisely these characteristics – that fact the these are communities with boundaries neither police nor other law-abiding citizens can easily penetrate – that make the information embedded within these communities so difficult to access.
2. On the Community Policing Consortium Web page (a coalition of five leading police practitioner and research organizations: IACP, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives, National Sheriffs' Association, Police Executive Research Forum, and the Police Foundation) each component of their definition of community policing highlights the centrality of working with citizen partners. In their detailed definition, partnership is listed as the first criterion. "Effective community policing has a positive impact on reducing neighborhood crime, helping to reduce fear of crime and enhancing the quality of life in the community. It accomplishes these things by combining the efforts and resources of the police, local government and community members. Community policing is a collaborative effort between the police and the community that identifies problems of crime and disorder and involves all elements of the community in the search for solutions to these problems. It is founded on close, mutually beneficial ties between police and community members. Community policing offers a way for law enforcement to help re-energize our communities. Developing strong, self-sufficient communities is an essential step in creating an atmosphere in which serious crime will not flourish" (CPC, 2001) (see also, IACP, 1994; Skolnick and Bayley, 1988; Skogan, 1990, pp. 91-2; Bureau of Justice Assistance, 1994).
3. This section is based on data gathered from in-depth key informant interviews; participant observations of partnership meetings, police department meetings, and other city agency meetings; and primary document analysis. A more detailed analysis based on these data can be found in Lyons (1999).
4. At the January 20, 1988 meeting of the council, for instance, the precinct captain presented the council with a 15-page report logging target activity for the previous week and he provided copies of several memos regarding blight removal and police accountability on target areas. By 1993 there were no such reports, though at the November 3, 1993 meeting

- a civilian from Crime Prevention passed out a 31-page xerox of the section from the mayor's proposed 1994 budget that covered the SPD (personal observations).
5. Interview: 34.
  6. Fleissner *et al.* (1991, p. 99); Interview: 31; Interview: 33; Interview: 9; Interview: 29. Identical concerns about the composition of existing partnerships were expressed in the report from the mayor's 1993 *Police-Community Relations Task Force: Recommendations and Report Identifying Means to Improve Police-Community Relations*.
  7. Interview: 33.
  8. Interview: 31; Interview: 33; Interview: 9; Interview: 29; Interview: 34; Interview: 27. Neighbors Against Drugs, Operation Results, Mothers Against Police Harassment and the Association of Community Organizations for Reform (ACORN) were told that joining the partnership – whose activities they did not support and who had already made them feel unwelcome – was the only way to have their concerns addressed.
  9. Interview: 19.
  10. Interview: 9. When the new chief arrived and the department began to seriously work with these communities, this particular group was impressed enough to change its name to Mothers For Police Accountability and become an active (if often critical) member of a police-community advisory board.
  11. This is not to say that current policing reforms have had no impact on crime, but that the limited positive impacts to date have been experienced predominantly by white, home-owning communities. (See Skogan, 1990, p. 108; Sadd and Grinc, 1994, pp. 44-5; Lyons, 1999.)

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