

FIGHTING TERRORISM ON A LOCAL LEVEL

Article

By

Commander Christopher O. Vicino
Pasadena Police Department

Command College Class XXXIII

Sacramento, California

November 2002

The year is 2010. It has been nine long years since the United States felt the hate of the holy war and watched hundreds of New Yorkers jump from the burning World Trade Center to their ultimate death. The massive buildings that eventually came down symbolized the end of the safety and security that Americans unwittingly took for granted. During the years after this horrific attack, the nation went to war, destroying terrorist cells in Afghanistan, the Philippines, Iran, and Korea. President George W. Bush took exhaustive measures to complete the demise and eventual assassination of Saddam Hussein in the name of world security. The United States government tightened its security, increased its intelligence, and sifted through endless pieces of gathered information that included terrorist threats of nuclear attacks, hi-jacked airplanes, biological warfare, and other diatribes of projected horrific death and destruction of Americans. None of these occurred.

Over the years, the American public became weary of the threats, increased taxes, and extraordinary security that inconvenienced even a trip to the grocery store. As a result, most of its citizens believed the terrorists were gone and Americans' longed for the days of a bustling economy, low taxes, and an end to the daily color-coded terror warnings from the Director of Homeland Security. With no other attacks on American soil, the public became desensitized to the possibility of such an attack ever occurring again. As public sentiment shifted, many small, local police departments ended their focus on terrorism by lessening security details, awareness, training and overall philosophy to a pre-terrorism era disposition. However, for one small police entity, the threat of terrorist attacks was never forgotten.

Today is September 11, 2010. It is a sizzling day in the Los Angeles basin. At 7:00 a.m., the city bound commuters on the 10 and 210 freeways are using their air conditioners to soothe the sun's pounding rays. Already, it is eighty degrees and by the lunch hour the heat will drive thermometers up to triple digits. Traffic is snarled and the occupants of each car tune into their favorite radio talk show to hear the latest garbage that is being portrayed as entertainment. A large yellow truck eases off the 210 freeway and maneuvers through the downtown area of Burbank, parking in front of an elementary school where 700 students attend each day. Two young men wait inside the cab of the truck, nervous they will be detected; each looks from side to side in an effort to locate any passersby. The men are somber, serious, and dedicated to their mission. They have waited patiently for nearly 9 years. They have planned the mission with precision and will die for its cause.

In the suburban cities of Glendale and Pasadena (approximately 10 miles from Los Angeles), the same plot is unfolding. Young men working in pairs, driving large trucks containing tons of explosives are positioning themselves in public areas where children and young adults are present.

At 7:35 a.m., all of the trucks are in place. Cellular telephone calls are made from a central location to all of the terrorist teams. The orders are given to detonate after assuring each team leader that God is pleased with their mission. The terrorists attempt to detonate their bombs, but nothing happens.

Simultaneously, the Anti-Terrorist Section (ATS) of the Tri-Cities Police Authority has three different units in place to watch the terrorists' trucks, while members of the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) team are deployed at each of the locations in

case an immediate assault is necessary. The ATS command intercepts and listens to the incoming cellular telephone calls that order the terrorists to carry out their plans. As the orders come to the terrorists, the ATS leadership instructs the SWAT officers to arrest the occupants of the trucks. The tactical teams swarm the trucks, removing the terrorists and placing them under arrest.

The ATS infiltrated the terrorist cell nearly two years ago, managing to identify the locations where their explosives would be purchased. The ATS arranged for each of the sales to the terrorist to be non-explosive material that would cause no public safety hazard. The public and the police officers making the arrest were never in danger.

The Tri-Cities Police Authority was formed in 2005 after the terrorists destroyed the World Trade Center and several successful regional police programs proved the idea of police consolidation worthy of a try.

Within this small suburban area, the police departments of Burbank, Glendale, and Pasadena created a regional atmosphere of sharing resources by introducing new programs in small increments. Beginning in 1998, the three police departments organized a regional helicopter section to patrol all of the cities; set up a singular SWAT team; and introduced a three-city canine team. Most importantly, these cities engineered a tri-city Anti-Terrorist Task Force with personnel resources coming from the reduction of overlap from their other regional efforts.

With great success in these regional programs, the three police departments began theorizing a merger. With two of the three police chiefs available for retirement in 2003, a plan was formulated to study the issue of consolidation. At the conclusion of

this study, it was apparent that the three police departments would be greatly enhanced as a result of a merger.

In 2005, the Tri-Cities Police Authority was born. This new department was under the leadership of one police chief and a police Board of Governors that represented each of the cities equally.

Police departments have gained a reputation for accepting the status quo and not identifying trends and signals that point to future criminal occurrences, general public disorder, or community discontent. For decades, law enforcement has been evaluated by its response to occurrences instead of its ability to stop them. Perhaps this is best exemplified with the failure of law enforcement to stop the attacks of September 11, 2001. Recent revelations that individual law enforcement personnel identified many faint signals of an impending terrorist plot underscores the problem of law enforcement's inability to read the sign posts of a coming future event. The idea of connecting the dots and taking proactive steps to mitigate a trend, or take advantage of one, is a skill that law enforcement leadership must hone.

Prior to September 11, 2001, most Americans did not give much thought to terrorism, the Taliban, or Afghanistan. Certainly, the infamous Osama bin Laden was not a household name. It is well documented that many federal law enforcement agencies worked on collecting information on terrorism and even identified many trends and possible events that had certain probabilities of occurrence. However, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks the system of law enforcement that had been set up to deal with terrorism was found to be wanting. Suddenly, terrorism was thrust into the

mainstream of American society. The executive branch of government, with the assistance of federal law enforcement executives, reorganized to deal with the new enemy. The measures initiated were meant to bring a sense of tranquility and a feeling of safety back to the nation's neighborhoods. Are the changes that have been put into place to fight future terrorist attacks enough to safeguard each citizen?

Future predictions of imminent terrorist attacks against the United States cry out for greater proactive involvement from municipal police departments. Most prognosticators have indicated the future American free society may resemble the war-like characteristics of current day Israel. Perhaps the July 4, 2002, attack at the Los Angeles International Airport against an Israeli airline was a sign of things to come. If such attacks become the norm, and the prognosticators are correct, municipal police will be dealing with circumstances that will overwhelm them. How should local law enforcement change to cope with the trend of projected future terrorism?

Consider the private sector. Big companies pull off mergers all the time, consolidating to form one larger entity. They build on the individual strengths of the other while eliminating the weaknesses, fat, and overlap that each would produce as an individual company.

Wells Fargo Bank and First Interstate Bank did it; Exxon Oil and Mobil Oil did it; and Hewlett Packard and Compaq did it. A long list of banks, manufacturers, and retailers, have followed a simple line of thinking: two companies with the same focus join forces to form one entity, ideally saving money, cutting overhead, trimming expenses, and producing a better product through synergy. Would it be possible for police departments to successfully do the same thing?

Since preserving human life and protecting property is the basic function of any police department, a merger of small police departments to create a larger, more effective entity would be sensible. With the threat of terrorism projected for our future, it may be time to design a better mousetrap: a regional police department.

The idea of regionalizing municipal police departments to form one larger law enforcement agency is not new. In fact, the movements toward the concept of consolidation seem to come and go with economic cycles, changing social ideologies, and outgrowths of divergence in governmental leadership (Halter, 1993). For many law enforcement executives, the idea of combining municipal police departments is inevitable.

In 1933, the National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement produced a report on policing in the United States. Within its research, the Wickersham Report, as it was known, noted considerable problems consistent in urban police forces that seriously affected the police in their fight against crime:

The multitude of police forces in any state and the varying standards of organization and services have contributed immeasurably to the general low grade of police performance in this country. The independence which police forces display toward each other in the absence of any central force which requires either a uniform or minimum standard of service leaves the way open for the profitable operation of criminals in an area where protection is often ineffectual at the best, generally only partial, and too frequently wholly absent (National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, 1934, p. 124).

In 1967, thirty-four years after the Wickersham report was published, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice issued a report that studied the decentralized American police model. The commission

described American policing as “fragmented, complicated, and frequently overlapping,” creating a country that has small police forces, each operating independently within the limits and jurisdiction of their imposed boundaries (Skoler, 1980). It was the opinion of this commission that the system of law enforcement was structured in such a way that it was detrimental to producing effective law enforcement. The commission recommended greater coordination, the sharing of resources, consolidating specialized units and even the merging of entire police services (Skoler, 1980) into one larger body or entity.

For many law enforcement executives, the idea of combining municipal police departments makes sense and may be inevitable. This sentiment was highlighted by then Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge as he told a group of municipal leaders in 1996 that they could no longer bury their heads in the sand and function as though the rest of the state, nation, and world did not exist. He explained to his reluctant audience that they must rid themselves of the status quo that supports the because-we-have-always-done-it-this-way mentality and urged them to lead through innovation and courage. Ridge suggested that the geographical borders that current municipal leaders hold sacred are undeniably artificial in the face of today’s technological advances and global economy. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, proved Ridge’s comments horrifically true.

In 2002, President George W. Bush’s State of the Union Address identified the need for federal, state, and local law enforcement officers to work together in an effort to gather intelligence and share information in order to fight terrorism and bolster

homeland security. President Bush stressed agency-to-agency law enforcement coordination, communication, trust, and even the consolidation of overlapping duties.

There are numerous successful police consolidations that have taken place that are worthy of review. On a somewhat smaller scale, the State of California saw the cities of Larkspur and Corte Madera (Marin County) consolidate their individual police departments into the Twin Cities Police Authority in January of 1980. The merger of these city police departments was the first in the state's history (<http://www.ci.corte-madera.ca.us/police>). The Twin Cities Police Authority currently serves a citizenry of 21,000 with 44 full time employees who provide full service policing to a geographic area of 8 square miles. Larkspur and Corte Madera are located just 11 miles north of the Golden Gate Bridge (<http://www.ci.corte-madera.ca.us/police>).

According to Chief of Police Phillip D. Green, the initial consolidation was difficult, but the benefits greatly outweighed the problems that were encountered. Chief Green proclaims that the consolidation of the two police departments reduced overlapping duties the police departments were performing as independent agencies. The reduction of these redundant responsibilities released personnel resources to allow the police authority to form a professional traffic bureau to address problems that each city was experiencing. Without the merger, Chief Green believes a specialized traffic unit would not have been possible (<http://www.ci.corte-madera.ca.us/police>).

The Las Vegas Nevada Metropolitan Police Department was formed through combining the Clark County Sheriff's Department with the municipal police department of the City of Las Vegas on July 1, 1973. Today, this police department serves the City of Las Vegas, boasting a population well over 1 million residents and encompasses 53

square miles. This agency has over 3,000 full time police officers (<http://www.lvmpd.com>).

The consolidation by the Nevada State Legislature resulted from an outgrowth of county and city governments squabbling over which of them was to provide services to a small geographic area that was historically rural, but was evolving to an urban environment with municipal needs (<http://www.lvmpd.com>).

One of the most significant and successful consolidation of police services occurred in Canada (Tomovich & Loree, 1989). In 1974, the Peel Regional Police were formed after the incorporation of the former police departments of Mississauga, Port Credit, Streetsville, Brampton, and Chinguacousy. Today, this police force is the second largest municipal agency in the Province of Ontario with over 2,000 full time employees, serving a population of over 950,000. The formation of this regional police department occurred as a result of the creation of the Regional Municipality of Peel, thus bringing all of the different city and county entities under one governmental structure (<http://www.peepolice.on.ca>). At the time this occurred, the idea of merging services and entire governments was an accepted mainstream solution to providing better services at reduced costs within Canada.

The Peel Regional Police were named after the father of modern policing, Sir Robert Peel (1788-1850). This regional police department has lived up to the reputation of its historical namesake by earning a world-class reputation for its progressive police services. In 1994, the department was accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA), the first police agency in Ontario to achieve this status and only the fifth in Canada. The Peel Regional Police have received many

acclaimed awards, including the prestigious Webber-Seavey Award for Quality in Law Enforcement sponsored by the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Motorola Corporation in 1995 (<http://www.peepolice.on.ca>).

Beyond the rhetoric of an individual politician, or the transformation made by a single state, or even the examples of consolidated police services that have been successful, there have also been police studies that overtly state or quietly imply the decentralized American police system is outdated and does not meet the needs of today's citizens.

In 1980, a consolidated police feasibility study was undertaken for the cities of Bell, Bell Gardens, Commerce, Cudahy, and Vernon. These cities are located in the Los Angeles basin, approximately 10 miles from the City of Los Angeles. At the time of this review, Bell, Bell Gardens, and Vernon operated their own police departments, while Commerce and Cudahy contracted with the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. The conclusion of the study recommended that these cities consolidate to form a singular regional police department. The authors of this report (Kenney, Adams, Vito, 1980) declared the newly-formed police department would possess more patrol officers and more detective personnel, develop new specialized units, and save enough money to hire additional civilian employees. This study proclaimed the departments would be able to eliminate overlapping assignments (i.e., K-9 police officers, crime prevention specialists and background investigators) by centralizing such units into one department. The report studied the service demands in all of the cities and found that the calls for police service did not support the need for each city to have one police officer in each of the listed assignments (Kenney et al., 1980). The additional officers

would be sent to the patrol or detective sections to increase personnel and service demands in these areas. With additional officers, a specialized crime prevention unit was theorized. The new creation would provide greater community contact and educational programs in the area of home and building security, drug intervention, and driver safety. Several administrative positions such as chiefs, commanders, and captains would be consolidated in this theorized merger of the five cities. The reduction of personnel costs at the top of the organization would theoretically provide funding for the hiring of civilian support personnel. The study projected the increase in civilian support personnel would allow police officers to spend more time on the street (Kenney et al., 1980) and thus, become more adept in fighting crime.

In 1996, the Sonoma County Law Enforcement Chiefs' Association of California, which consists of the police chiefs from the cities of Cloverdale, Healdsburg, Rohnert Park, Sebastopol, Cotati, Petaluma, Santa Rosa, Sonoma, and the sheriff from the County of Sonoma, submitted a concept paper to the federal Department of Justice. The association seeking funding for a comprehensive study that would recommend the most effective manner to structure how police services should be delivered to the citizens within this county. The association's proposal did not incorporate any preconceived ideas on the appropriate structure of the police department. In fact, the chiefs' theorized that all options should be considered, including joint powers agreement, contractual arrangement, or even a regional consolidated police department. Within this proposal, the association identified the need for each community to retain local identity with its police department, regardless of the manner in which the police organization was formed. The idea of local identity was theorized to be

the key element to strive for if a new type of police agency was organized (Sonoma County Law Enforcement Chiefs' Association, 1996). The request for funding for this research was not granted and a formal plan was never established or implemented. However, the concept plan submitted for consideration was extraordinary as it had the support of the executives from each of the police agencies, city managers and other local politicians. Today, law enforcement leaders in this county continue to have a strong interest in the creation of a new policing model to improve police service delivery.

In 2000, a San Francisco Civil Grand Jury Report to study a San Francisco County and City of San Francisco police services merger was concluded. The results of this study recommended the formation of an advisory commission to perform a detailed, analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of a possible merger between these two police agencies. Preliminarily, the grand jury reported that it could not find any evidence of a police merger that did not ultimately realize financial savings or any merger that was reversed as a result of failure. The investigation into this issue found that police services to the public were increased, specialization was augmented, and expenditures for police services were lowered (San Francisco Civil Grand Jury, 2000).

The Changing Landscape

Terrorism is real and it has caused death and destruction on American soil. The attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, have caused American society to look hard at what is important in life. Many media sources have reported that Americans have been forever changed, as they are less inclined to chase the almighty dollar and seem to be more likely to seek out family members, old friends and a simple, less hectic life. In a recent press conference, Vice-President Dick Cheney told reporters that it was

almost a certainty the United States would be attacked again by terrorists (Fournier, 2002). How will law enforcement maintain its critical role of keeping the peace under such a changing and seemingly chaotic environment?

For the federal government, the answer to this question is unfolding. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has reorganized itself and established a new mission. The FBI will become less of an investigative agency and more of a proactive organization that will concentrate on defending Americans from terrorism. The FBI will seek out intelligence information on American citizens, persons visiting America, and identify those persons who are from other countries that are bent on the destruction of the United States (Fournier, 2002). The FBI's new mission marks the beginning of a new era for an organization that has not set new goals and objectives for itself in over 50 years. The new Office of Homeland Security (OHS) will focus on centralizing information as it creates a clearinghouse for intelligence information from the FBI, Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the Secret Service. The OHS is defining its role in the shadow of revelations the FBI and CIA that may have been able to stop the terrorists on September 11, 2001 with greater information sharing and cooperation. The OHS will provide management of intelligence information in order to ensure appropriate action is taken on areas of concern. President Bush has recently recommended a budget to Congress that would expand the OHS and add a director to the new agency.

For state, county, and local law enforcement the answer is not so simple. Police departments are currently attempting to find ways to fight terrorism as expectations rise from local citizens and budgets shrink. With limited resources and little expertise, most

local police agencies do not have the abilities to provide citizens greater security against terrorists' organizations the likes of Hezbollah, the Egyptian Islamic Jihad and Al Qaeda.

For many local law enforcement agencies, surviving in a future that may bring terrorist attacks each day, will require an increase in personnel, equipment, infrastructure and training.

For each city, police department costs are becoming responsible for the majority of the municipality's budget. It makes sense that during times of economic hardship, city leaders would look for ways to reduce the cost to provide police services. Contrary to the idea of reducing such costs, is the public demand for greater security from terrorism. Financial restrictions that limit or reduce police resources strike at the very heart of the fight on terrorism debate. In order to provide the services that communities of the future will need and expect, police departments may find what they need in a municipal consolidation of several police departments and the creation of a more centralized policing model. Consolidating police departments will reduce costs, decrease overlapping responsibilities, and allow more specialization and expertise.

Future alterations and modifications to the current decentralized American police model calls for extraordinary innovation, careful management and planning, strong leadership, but most of all: the courage to make change. If it is ever done, the pay off may be considerable.

REFERENCES

- Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement. (1934). Report on the police. United States Printing Office. p. 124.
- Flannery, Thomas L. (1996). Ridge applauds move toward regionalism. Retrieved March 20, 2002, from <http://www.sweetliberty.org/issues.regionalism/ridge.htm>
- Fournier, Ron. (2002, May 15). FBI chief airs dire prediction. *Pasadena Star-News*. pp. A-1,6.
- Consolidation material: life after consolidation and traffic enforcement issues. (n.d.). Retrieved March 20, 2002, from <http://www.ci.larkspur.ca.us/3070.html>.
- Consolidation of the Las Vegas police department and the Clark county sheriff's department.(n.d.). Retrieved April 4, 2002, from <http://www.lvmpd.com/overview/ovrcons.htm>
- Halter, Gary. (1993, May). City-city consolidations in the United States. *National Civic Reviews* (Vol. 82).
- History of the peel regional police department. (n.d.) Retrieved March 19, 2002, from <http://www.peelpolice.on.ca>.
- Kenney, John P., Adams, Gary B., & Vito, Gennaro F. (1980, March). Consolidation of police services: an opportunity for innovation. *Journal of Police Science and Administration* (Vol. 4).
- Oppal, Justice. (1994). Closing the gap: policing and the community. British Columbia Commission of Inquiry on Police (Vol. 1, Section D). p. 45.
- Rubinstein, Moshe F. & Firstenberg, Iris R. (1999). *The minding organization*. Wiley.
- San Francisco Civil Grand Jury Report (2002). Consolidation of county and city police

department study.

Sheriff and police department merger study. (2000). San Francisco Civil Grand Jury.

Skoler, Daniel. (1980). *Progress in policing: essays on change*. Harper Press.

Sonoma County Law Enforcement Chiefs' Association (1996). Community oriented policing services by maintaining a local identity and providing specialized services on a countywide basis. Department of Justice Grant Submission Request.

State of the union address to congress. (2002). Retrieved March 1, 2002 from <http://www.CNN.com>

Tomovich, V.A., & Loree, D.J. (1989). In search of new directions: policing in the Niagara region. *Canadian Police College Journal*.