

**RESPONDING TO THE THREAT OF  
TERRORIST STREET GANGS**

by

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

The views and conclusions expressed in the Command College Futures Project and journal article are those of the author, and are not necessarily those of the CA Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST).

## **RESPONDING TO THE THREAT OF TERRORIST STREET GANGS**

With the ever-present threat of terrorism, and the increasing sophistication of street gangs in America, some may wonder if gangs themselves will adapt to use terrorist tactics to accomplish traditional goals in the next decade. If so, what can the police do in response? Certainly, public safety will suffer if law enforcement is not prepared to address the danger of these sophisticated and increasingly violent gangs. The Federal Government and many local community organizations have already taken some steps to reduce gang violence and terrorism. Nevertheless, law enforcement, especially line level officers and deputies, will take the lead in a future where vigilance and preparation may be the best tools to ensure gang terrorism does not happen.

### Gangs and Terrorism

Some people fear that someday a single charismatic gang leader with the potential of uniting many different gangs under one umbrella may become a force multiplier in criminal activity. An article published in the WashingtonTimes.com on July 25, 2007, entitled, “MS-13 Gang Seeks to Unite Nationwide” takes up this issue. The article describes this international gang as “attempting to become a unified criminal enterprise operating under one leadership.” The United State’s Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and other experts say the gang’s tactics are terrorist in nature but they question whether small groups can unify under one leader.

The January 2007 “Report of the Future of Terrorism Task Force”, described the concern of terrorism as “a chronic problem requiring a sustained a patient strategy, with ever evolving tactics.” The report said, “Terrorism is a tactic that can be used by any adversary.” It said the future of terrorism will be greatly influenced by the use and

availability of technology. Weaponry will become cheaper, readily available and more devastating. This means more enemies may acquire and use them against innocent civilians.<sup>1</sup> Admiral James Loy, the former Acting Secretary of Homeland Security, testified before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in February 2005. He discussed threats against the United States homeland. Among the five points he made regarding the worldwide threat from terrorism, he said, “We assess that al-Qaeda continues to be the primary trans-national threat group, although we are seeing the emergence of other threatening groups and gangs like MS-13 that will also be destabilizing influences.”<sup>2</sup>

There already exist some laws, policies and programs to combat the adverse impact of gangs in urban areas across America. Many of them have been beneficial to lower the incidence and severity of violence. Using these existing partnerships, we will examine how a three-prong approach to gang intervention will serve to mitigate their efforts to expand their influence through conventional and unconventional means. These three prongs are: Enforcement; not just arrests, but leading-edge programs; education, both for gang members and the public; and, engineering solutions to meet this rising tide of criminal organizations emerging from traditional gangs.

### Gang Demographics

According to a report by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators Association entitled the 2005 National Gang Threat Assessment, there are an estimated 21,500 gangs

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Homeland Security, “Report of the Future of Terrorism Task Force, January 2007”, <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac-future-terrorism-010107.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Department of Homeland Security, “Testimony by Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security Admiral James Loy before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence”, [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/testimony/testimony\\_0030.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/testimony/testimony_0030.shtm)

in the United States with an estimated 731,500 members. This estimate does not include outlaw motorcycle gangs, prison gangs or adult gangs. A majority of U.S. cities with populations over 100,000 report having a youth gang problem. All U.S. cities with populations over 250,000 reported having problems with youth gangs. Over the past several decades, street gangs have shown an increasing propensity for violent behavior.<sup>3</sup>

A new style of gangs, called a “hybrid gang,” has begun to emerge in the past few years. Members have no national affiliations, and they are beginning to change the face of what a typical gang traditionally looks like. They may make alliances with rival gangs for the purposes of creating limited partnerships in committing crimes that could benefit both gangs. The National Gang Threat Assessment report says some gangs are moving away from having members wear tattoos to show allegiance or requiring a certain type of clothing in an effort to appear less like a gang member and to make it harder for law enforcement to identify them as such.<sup>4</sup> Detective Wayne Caffey of the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Office concurred, saying that street gang subculture is an ever changing and adapting phenomenon.

Since the 1800’s, street gangs developed across our nation and banded together at first for connection to people from their own ethnicities and later for self-protection. Street gangs soon began to conduct criminal activities of their own.<sup>5</sup> The 1970’s and 1980’s were violent times for victims of gang violence in the United States. Disputes

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<sup>3</sup> “2005 National Gang Threat Assessment”, National Alliance of Gang Investigators Association, Bureau of Justice Assistance

<sup>4</sup> “2005 National Gang Threat Assessment”, National Alliance of Gang Investigators Association, Bureau of Justice Assistance

<sup>5</sup> Detective Wayne Caffey has served for 24 years with the Los Angeles, California, Police Department (LAPD) and has worked in gang enforcement and investigations for 20 of those years. He is currently assigned to the Gang and Operations Support Division – Gang Support Section and is a nationally recognized expert and speaker on African-American and Hispanic street and prison gangs.

over turf and the drug trade fueled the onset of drive-by shootings on what seemed like a daily basis throughout major cities in America. Gang members were recruited at increasingly younger ages. If they survived the violence, many continued the lifestyle well into adulthood. This period also marked the migration of people from El Salvador who fled to the United States after a twelve-year civil war in their country. Many of these new arrivals settled in large urban U.S. Cities where gangs were already established. Many displaced Salvadoran young people either joined existing gangs or formed their own for protection. <sup>6</sup>

By the 1990's, especially because of the Rodney King beating and the subsequent riots in Los Angeles, some of the major gangs in the country began to come together in truce. The peace was short lived because rival gangs continued to compete for the upper hand of the various illicit activities in which the gangs were involved. The history of gangs in America alone does not mean that gang members will subscribe to terrorist tactics, but their worldview is much broader than in years past, as is their intensifying violence. The F.B.I. reported a 500 percent rise in gang related homicides between 1980 and 1994. <sup>7</sup>

Two of the primary gangs that Salvadorans in the U.S. joined were the 18<sup>th</sup> Street ("Mara 18"), which was originally comprised of Mexican gang members, or the Mara Salvatrucha ("MS13") which was formed by Salvadorans. Lee Charlton, Senior Intelligence Research Specialist for the DEA in San Diego explained that elitist

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<sup>6</sup> "No Place to Hide: Gang, State, and Clandestine Violence in El Salvador," Human Rights Program, Harvard Law School, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Peter F. Episcopo and Darrin L. Moor, "Focus on Information Resources, The Violent Gang and Terrorist Organizations File", October 1996

governments in Central American countries that experienced civil wars in the 1980's and 1990's often exerted such pressure on their own people that many children have been left without parental guidance. Without a stable home life, gangs often fill in the void of a value system for parentless children.<sup>8</sup>

In August 2007, Mr. Carlton conducted a presentation entitled "Domestic Officer Safety Issues – Southwest Border Kidnappings & Narco – Violence". The presentation on Southwest border violence highlights the key issue of this article by showing that Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTOs) are resorting to extreme violence along U.S. / Mexican border towns. The primary tactic has been kidnapping, many of which take place in plain view and in a public place. Victims are often held and beaten while the suspects extort money from the victim's family. While many victims are involved in the drug trade, others are chosen based on the amount of money the suspects feel they may be able to extort. In Laredo, Texas, approximately 10-15% of the kidnap victims are business owners or other people who are not involved in criminal activities. As gangs conduct more kidnappings, they hone their effectiveness and graduate to higher value targets in wealthier communities. Mr. Charlton believes that "Until a prominent U.S. citizen is abducted, the problem will not receive much attention in the media or from the public."

Mr. Charlton's presentation described over 1200 drug trafficking-related executions in Mexico during the first seven months of 2007. All states in Mexico have also experienced numerous law enforcement deaths. Some officer deaths resulted from kidnappings, including from the residences of the officers. Other officers were ambushed

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<sup>8</sup> Interview with Lee Charlton on March 14, 2008.

and shot to death in their vehicles. The deaths included federal and local police officers, many of whom were targeted for not cooperating with the DTOs criminal activities. The bodies of several victims were either, dismembered, decapitated, bound, or disfigured in some other gruesome way and messages were attached to the corpses as a warning to law enforcement or other enemies of the gang. In one case, five decapitated heads were left on the floor of a dance hall with a warning message from the DTO.

Mr. Charlton also explained the DTO kidnap gang structure in his presentation. Some of the kidnap gangs included former or current Mexican law enforcement officers. Some gangs included former military deserters who were trained in extractions, assassinations and assaults. Some gangs resorted to kidnappings because access to narcotics was sometimes in decline. Several U.S. street gangs worked with DTOs, acting as independent contractors for kidnappings or assassinations.<sup>9</sup>

### **Terrorism and Street Gangs**

The Federal Bureau of Investigations defines terrorism as, “The Unlawful use of force or violence committed by a group or individual against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives.”<sup>10</sup> The California Penal Code defines a criminal gang as, “Any on-going organization, association, or group of three or more persons, whether formal or informal, having as one of its primary activities the commission of one or more criminal acts, and which has a common name or common identifying sign or symbol, and whose members individually or collectively engage or

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<sup>9</sup> PowerPoint presentation "Domestic Officer Safety Issues – Southwest Border Kidnappings & Narco – Violence – An SD-LECC Intelligence Perspective", Mr. Lee Charlton, Senior Intelligence Research Specialist, DEA – San Diego Intelligence Group I

<sup>10</sup> <http://baltimore.fbi.gov/domter.htm>

have engaged in a pattern of criminal activity.”<sup>11</sup> Combining the actions of the two definitions, as described in the DTOs in Mexico, could lead to a societal catastrophe if not controlled before terrorist-style street gangs establish a stronghold in this country.

A shift in the nature of violent acts like those used by terrorist groups worldwide would have serious implications on all levels of American society. Some extreme examples of terrorist acts committed by gangs worldwide include bombings of public gatherings, beheadings, kidnap for ransom, and murder for hire by other gangs to raise money. Kidnappings for ransom, especially between warring drug cartels, have been commonplace in Mexico and South America for several years and this trend is catching on in places like Phoenix, AZ. There, the level of violence has increased and police fear innocent people might become caught in the crossfire from shootouts between gang members and police or targets for abduction.

Lauren Mack, a spokesperson for Immigration and Customs Enforcement in San Diego, said drug cartels have recently begun to target legitimate business owners.<sup>12</sup> Worse yet, some smugglers have attempted to hire members of the MS-13 gang to murder border patrol agents because they are angry about increased security along the U.S. / Mexican border. The concern was serious enough to generate an officer safety alert warning officers to be aware of the threat.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> California Penal Code

<sup>12</sup> Police fear violence from border-related kidnappings Ransoms high, cases rising  
Lindsey Collom, The Arizona Republic, Feb. 26, 2008,  
<http://www.azcentral.com/news/articles/0226kidnapping0226.html>

<sup>13</sup> "Report: MS-13 gang hired to murder Border Patrol", Inland daily Bulletin, By Sara A. Carter and Mason Stockstill, Staff Writers, Article Created: 01/09/2006 09:29:23 PM PST,  
[http://www.dailybulletin.com/news/ci\\_3386933](http://www.dailybulletin.com/news/ci_3386933)

Frank J. Cilluffo, Director of the Homeland Security Policy Institute at the George Washington University, testified before the U.S. House Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment Subcommittee on June 14, 2007. His topic was "Assessing and Addressing the Threat: Defining the Role of a National Commission on the Prevention of Violent Radicalization and Homegrown Terrorism" where he discussed the issue of radicalized prison inmates and the need to "get ahead of the problem". Mr. Cilluffo stated, in part, "The threat is real and plainly, our shores will not act as a failsafe against it. Yet it is something of a misnomer to speak of "homegrown terrorism" for the term is suggestive of watertight compartments that do not in fact exist. To the contrary, we live in a borderless world and the threats that we face are similarly transnational. That said, the United States remains in some respects reasonably well situated. Other countries are currently experiencing a more full-blown manifestation of certain dimensions of the problem such as the United Kingdom. In a sense therefore, we have an opportunity to get ahead of the curve and deal proactively with these elements before they have the chance to flourish more vigorously in this country. Fortunately, the domestic plots that we have seen in the U.S. to date have evidenced intent but not much in the way of capability – but we would be foolish to think that the two cannot or will not come together in future."

Mr. Charlton stated a street gang that employs terrorist tactics would be motivated to employ such tactics to intimidate rivals, including law enforcement as the gang strives to gain dominance. He said the historical motivation of street gangs in the U.S. seems to be monetary or instant gratification as opposed to the terrorist organization that is motivated by ideals or the desire to spread their message. As noted, some U.S. gangs are already beginning to work with DTOs, committing kidnappings and killings of rival gang

members. It would not be a big jump for some of these gangs to branch out on their own, taking on such sinister acts to satisfy their own desires.

## **WHERE GANGS MAY BE HEADED IN THE FUTURE**

In July 2007, an expert panel was convened by the author to study the issue of street gangs in the U.S. transforming into terror organizations.

The panel of experts in the separate fields of gangs and terrorism, including representatives from the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Corrections, the California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training, a law enforcement educator and a local law enforcement gang expert.<sup>14</sup> They discussed several possible future trends that could lead to street gangs adopting terrorist tactics. The panel did not assert a specific belief that street gangs would turn into terrorist organizations, but voiced concern about possible trends that could develop given the current world events.

The panel agreed there was a high probability that gang members entering the U.S. from countries where terrorism or civil war had taken place, (like El Salvador), would come with the experience of being a terrorist veteran. They felt it was highly likely terrorist groups would work with street gangs to smuggle people and equipment that could be used in terrorist acts across our borders. This would be supported not only by terrorist groups providing money to the gangs, but also by terrorist source countries that might pay local street gangs to accomplish this task.

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<sup>14</sup> Nominal Group Technique (NGT) panel members: Mr. Brian Cook-Supervising Special Agent Federal Bureau of Investigations, Mr. Jim Lane- Detective, Marin County Sheriff's Department, Mr. Walt Kosta -Criminology Instructor, College of Marin, Mr. Brian Parry-Chief Law Enforcement of Department of Corrections, Mr. Gary Peterson-P.O.S.T. Terrorism Instructor, Sergeant, Martinez Police Department, \*Mr. Christopher Merendino-Senior Special Agent, U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Immigrations and Customs Enforcement

There was a high level of concern that the level of violence against law enforcement officers by past or current members of the military would also increase. There were two primary reasons provided for the concern of this trend. First, gang members from countries like El Salvador may have military experience in their home countries. In addition, street gang members have been joining U.S. military organizations in increasing numbers in recent years.

Some panel members felt the public response to street gangs implementing terrorist tactics would have consequences of their own if the phenomenon does come to fruition. They felt there would be a marked increase in death and physical injuries and well as mental health problems by members of the public that would coincide with increased intensity of violent crimes committed by gang members. Other panel members thought absenteeism by workers could have an affect on the economy, especially if people refrain from travel because of fears of terrorism. Perceptions of dangerous neighborhoods beset by bombings and bodiless heads found in public places will have a negative affect on property values and the psyche of our society.

Finally, the panel felt the result of the public's feelings of insecurity could be seen in their fear to attend large public gatherings like shopping centers, parks or sporting events, if they do not feel assured of their security.

Thinking how gangs will continue to change and adapt to world local and global conditions so that they may achieve their intended goals, law enforcement must be no different. In fact, we must look to the future of potential gang trends to combat the dangers posed by gangs before they can take hold in communities.

### Law Enforcement's Response

Mr. Charlton said the incidents of kidnappings, whether or not they involve narcotics, might increase in the next few years throughout California as gangs realize the potential of earning money through kidnapping for ransom. He said that within the next five years, cities in California might be facing major trouble from violent street gangs who are likely to have little regard about shootouts with law enforcement officers

The future is also likely to see gangs committing more white-collar crimes as they use the Internet to steal money through identity theft and by committing other cyber crimes like on-line gambling, extortion, fraud, money laundering, etc. It may take some time for investigators to determine the connection between these types of crimes and gang members who commit them because it may be difficult to identify suspects using the Internet.

The key to combat the possibility that street gangs will transition into terrorist organizations lies in partnerships between law enforcement and others to establish strategies to reduce the possibility of gangs implementing terrorist tactics. Building relationships with community groups, legislatures, and other law enforcement agencies will provide the needed success to achieve this goal.

Tools like the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) Act help prosecutors to convict gang members of serious crimes. There are also networks of gang task forces and terrorism taskforces across the globe that works to combat crimes committed by these organizations. Nevertheless, there is more to the problem than a "Bag 'em and Tag 'em" approach to combating gang crimes and their potential for turning into terrorist organizations.

## Goals and Objectives

Planning a law enforcement response to mitigate gangs using terrorist tactics must have measurable standards to evaluate its effectiveness. Goals and objectives to achieve these strategies include:

- Reducing violent crime by preventing terrorist style crimes
- Provide on-going gang and terrorism training to local law enforcement

The following outcomes will result upon implementation of the strategic plan:

- Reduction in violent crimes
- Reduction in property crimes
- Increase in citizen sense of security
- Fewer officer injuries resulting from assaults

The goals and objectives can be met by grouping them into three categories, Education, Engineering, and Enforcement.

### Education

Law enforcement must recognize the importance of education in the prevention of gang violence and the rehabilitation of gang members. It should support funding of educational and vocational programs to help community members thrive in the job market. This is especially true for at-risk youth and paroled prison inmates. Educational programs like Gang Resistance Education And Training, (G.R.E.A.T), taught to school age children to help them avoid gang recruitment and make better choices during their adolescent years.

Education also relates to job training, mentoring, after-school activities, and recreational programs. Rehabilitation programs for former gang members who want to turn their lives around and outreach programs to provide alternatives to gang involvement will help to reduce recidivism in gangs and deter would-be gang members from ever joining. Organizations like Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles, whose mission is "to assist at-risk and former gang involved youth to become contributing members of our community through a variety of services in response to their multiple needs. Free programs -- including counseling, education, tattoo removal, job training and job placement -- enable young people to redirect their lives and provide them with hope for their futures."<sup>15</sup>

Law Enforcement must improve mandatory training relating to gangs and terrorism for all street level police officers and supervisors. This would include a basic history of gang evolution, annual updates of gang crime trends, practical hands-on exercises geared toward investigating violent gang crimes and officer safety techniques when dealing with gang members or suspected gang members. Finally, the training should include mitigation techniques for officers working in communities prone to or susceptible to gangs that may implement terrorist style tactics in the commission of their crimes. Training in these areas are perishable skills because of the changing nature of each. Therefore, agencies should provide annual updates by qualified instructors.

### Engineering

Law enforcement must work to eliminate alienation among community members by promoting community ownership of all members within the community. One way this is achieved is by participating in meetings with the community to discuss issues relating

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.homeboy-industries.org/>

to crime and safety. Whenever possible, law enforcement should participate in community events with a goal of creating an atmosphere of trust by community members. Law enforcement should promote a forum for members of the public to air their differences or voice their concerns in matters of crime and safety within their community. It should establish ways to celebrate diversity but promote unity among the community.

Another way for law enforcement to engineer a reduction in street gangs adopting terrorist tactics is through a process known as Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). The process involves law enforcement working with planning and building departments in environmental design of new neighborhoods or the redesigning of existing communities. The design of physical spaces that are well lit and open provide for unfriendly places to conduct criminal activities.

Immigration reform is likely help reduce the number of gang members entering the U.S. This may have a positive ripple effect on violent crime in this country. Law enforcement should support legislation.

Law enforcement should use every available avenue to pursue advanced technology and data sharing at all levels. Technology changes rapidly and costs associated with staying current or ahead of the curve will undoubtedly be high. Law enforcement agencies must be able to forecast budget needs and fight vigorously to obtain necessary funding to be effective in fighting crime.

#### Enforcement

A major component to enforcement is on-going information sharing between all appropriate levels of law enforcement as it relates to gangs and terrorism. In March 2006, Michael Chertoff, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security spoke at a

symposium entitled “Justice and Public Information Sharing”. He said during the early 1980’s when organized crime dominated many major cities in the U.S., collaboration and information sharing played a major role in the successful apprehension and prosecution of organized crime family members. The challenge in today’s crime fighting environment is that criminals may have the appearance of being less organized as a group yet they may be far more sophisticated than their predecessors ever were.

Mr. Chertoff said law enforcement’s early warning system must consist of properly used and shared intelligence because terrorists will sneak in with bombs and weapons and blending into our “ordinary civilian life”. He went on to say that good intelligence effective collection, effective analysis, and effective sharing of information is important for success.<sup>16</sup>

One key tool Mr. Chertoff described in the process of intelligence gathering is the intelligence Fusion Centers. There are currently 58 Fusion Centers around the country designed for law enforcement and intelligence officials to analyze and coordinate intelligence information and develop security measures with the intent of reducing terrorism threats in local communities.<sup>17</sup>

According to the Department of Homeland Security website, Fusion Centers are intended to:

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<sup>16</sup>Department of Homeland Security website, “Remarks by the Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff 2006 Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice and SEARCH Symposium on Justice and Public Safety Information Sharing” [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/speeches/speech\\_0273.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/speeches/speech_0273.shtm)

<sup>17</sup>Department of Homeland Security website, “Remarks by the Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff 2006 Bureau of Justice Assistance, U.S. Department of Justice and SEARCH Symposium on Justice and Public Safety Information Sharing” [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/speeches/speech\\_0273.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/speeches/speech_0273.shtm)

- provide critical sources of unique law enforcement and threat information
- facilitate sharing information across jurisdictions and function
- provide a conduit between men and women on the ground protecting their local communities and state and federal agencies.<sup>18</sup>

Currently, gang members from China, the former Soviet Union, and El Salvador are banned from entry into the United States. The Administration will expand the restriction to keep other international gang members from entering the United States. The Administration is also trying to reform the background check process in order to expedite the process without compromising national security.<sup>19</sup>

The Department of Homeland Security has established partnerships with state and local law enforcement agencies to address illegal immigration in communities. Formal task forces and greater use of the ICE Law Enforcement Support Center (LESC), which “serves as a national enforcement operations center by providing timely immigration status and identity information to local, state and federal law enforcement agencies on aliens suspected, arrested or convicted of criminal activity.”<sup>20</sup>

The Department of Homeland Security’s Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has teamed up with state and local law enforcement officers to focus attention on transnational violent street gangs. Beginning in 2006, operations, like “Community Shield” targeted these groups, arresting 2,388 gang members from 239 different gangs

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<sup>18</sup> The Department of Homeland Security website, [http://www.dhs.gov/xinfoshare/programs/gc\\_1156877184684.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xinfoshare/programs/gc_1156877184684.shtm)

<sup>19</sup> Department of Homeland Security “Fact Sheet: Improving Border Security and Immigration Within Existing Law” website, [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr\\_1186757867585.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/pr_1186757867585.shtm)

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement website, <http://www.ice.gov/partners/lesc/>

and seizing over a hundred firearms in the process. Most of those arrested have violent criminal histories.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, the Report of the Future of Terrorism recommended the establishment of an Office of Net Assessment, whose duties would include:

- “studying existing threats in order to project their evolution into the future;
- studying trends in the weapons, technologies, modalities, and targets utilized by our adversaries (i.e., the events that can transform the security landscape);
- reviewing existing U.S. capabilities in order to identify gaps between current capabilities and the requirements of tomorrow’s threats;
- conducting war games and red team scenarios to introduce innovative thinking on possible future threats;
- assessing how terrorist groups/cells could operate around, and/or marginalize the effectiveness of, policies and protective measures.”<sup>22</sup>

These efforts are a sign that some in the law enforcement community are aware of the potential that exist for street gangs to adopt terrorist style tactics. We know where we have been and we know where we currently stand in the battle to combat street gangs and terrorism. The problem is that we also know the future is uncertain as it relates how our enemy will attack. Knowledge, effective communication, training and vigilance are the tools that help law enforcement protect against future attacks.

### Conclusion

A great deal of effort has been already been put in place to combat gangs and the consistent threats of terrorism. However, there does not appear to be an end in sight for the vigilance required to maintain a safe society. We must build on the successes

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<sup>21</sup> Department of Homeland Security, “ICE Arrests 375 Gang Members and Associates in Two-Week Enforcement Action”, [http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/press\\_release\\_0878.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/xnews/releases/press_release_0878.shtm)

<sup>22</sup> Department of Homeland Security, “Report of the Future of Terrorism Task Force, January 2007”, <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac-future-terrorism-010107.pdf>

achieved so far and adapt to an ever changing threat from street gangs that might begin to employ terrorist tactics here, like those described above.

Immediate and ongoing decisive action must be undertaken at all levels of society to ensure street gangs do not adopt terrorist tactics or morph into terrorist organizations. Law enforcement can influence the future status of street gangs and the rest of society take proactive steps to prevent such a negative future. We are doing a lot to combat the threat of gang violence and terrorism, but we must do more. Just as the terrorists adapt their tactics to achieve their goals, so too must we adjust our response to the threat.

A first step in this process includes consistent scanning of gang and terrorism events around the world and considering how those events could happen here. Law enforcement officials should consider the conditions, which lead to the terrorist action to determine if the suspects could have just as easily committed the attack in the U.S.

The Department of Homeland Security plans to embark on ongoing media campaigns to engage the public in dialog about the burden we all face resulting from terrorism. The public must accept its role in sharing the responsibility to combat the threat.<sup>23</sup> Consistent dialog about the issue between stakeholders will help to bring the issue to the forefront of concern for lawmakers, decision makers, and action takers so funding for programs, equipment and training can be made available to meet the needs to address the problem.

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<sup>23</sup>Department of Homeland Security, "Report of the Future of Terrorism Task Force, January 2007", <http://www.dhs.gov/xlibrary/assets/hsac-future-terrorism-010107.pdf>