

**POLICE WORK AND HOMELAND SECURITY  
CAN A SMALL AGENCY MAKE IT WORK?**

**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).

## **POLICE WORK AND HOMELAND SECURITY CAN A SMALL AGENCY MAKE IT WORK?**

Imagine a sergeant in charge of a Community Policing Unit is brainstorming with the Chief of Police on how to define their department's role since the attacks on 9/11. As they toss around ideas on how their small agency can contribute to Homeland Security issues, the sergeant remembers there is a Mosque in an unassuming building on the other side of town. He also knows the department has had no substantial relationship with the members of this community other than minor calls for service. The Chief and the Sergeant see this as an excellent opportunity to build a relationship with the local Muslim Community, and at the same time, help further the cause of strengthening their role in Homeland Security issues. Soon thereafter, the Community Policing Bureau meets the Imam of the Mosque and a dialog of friendship ensues.

Several months later, the Imam approaches the sergeant and tells him that one of their newest visitors openly talks about radical views towards the United States and its involvement in the Middle East. The Imam says that this person's rhetoric is making the members of the mosque uneasy and very suspicious.

The sergeant takes this information and confers with an FBI Special Agent, whom he knows from working cases together in the past. They discover this individual is wanted on immigration violations, and has possible terrorist connections to a foiled plot in another part of the country. The individual is arrested by federal officials with the aid of local police the next day. Did they prevent an incident of terror on American Soil? Who knows; but then again, common sense might say yes.

Small law enforcement agencies can and do have the ability and expertise to be an integral part of the Homeland Security mission. Why not utilize a “dual-front” approach to address the dual issue of community partnership and Homeland Security. By utilizing and focusing the in depth knowledge, relationships and trust with the local Islamic community while simultaneously working with other law enforcement agencies in a Joint Terrorism Task Force, small police departments can improve local relationships and have a part in better protecting the United States.

### CAN IT WORK?

The terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 changed America forever. It not only propelled this country into ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it has forced all levels of law enforcement, including local, to reevaluate and take on a more defined role in Homeland Security issues. Local law enforcement agencies are the first responders in the event of a terrorist attack. Local law enforcement needs to think globally and act locally.<sup>1</sup> This direction was proposed and instituted by the FBI Director Mueller in 2005.<sup>2</sup> For small local police agencies who have limited resources, developing a strategy to deal with terrorism issues such as bombings, attacks and funding operations can seem monumental but not impossible.

In America’s unprecedented focus on terrorism, emphasis has been placed on the Islamic community. This is due to the fact the 9/11 suspects were radical Muslim extremists, thus prompting a suspicion of Islam and Muslims, even in local

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<sup>1</sup> Carter D. (2004). *Law Enforcement Intelligence: A guide for State, Local, and Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies*. Washington, D.C: Office of Community Oriented Policing Surveys.

<sup>2</sup> Mueller, Robert S; Director; *Think Globally and Act Locally*; Federal Bureau of Investigation; <http://fbi.gov/page2/page2index/intell.htm> ; August 3, 2005

communities.<sup>3</sup> The interaction between law enforcement and the Islamic community in some areas suffered greatly after the attacks. A 2006 study on law enforcement and the Arab American community, noted the government reaction to the terrorist attacks afterwards also contributed to friction with the local Muslim population.<sup>4</sup> One particular example of relational friction took place in Dearborn, Michigan after the 9/11 attacks.

Dearborn's Islamic population wanted to show their support for America by holding a march a month after 9/11. City officials, though, denied their request because they feared that violence and civil unrest would follow.<sup>5</sup> City officials were concerned that the purpose of the march might be misconstrued or ignored and attacks on marchers would occur.<sup>6</sup>

Another example of government actions causing friction with local Islamic communities was the thousands of voluntary interviews of Arab men by the Justice Department<sup>7</sup> These interviews took place after 9/11 in 2001 and 2002. In the course of the FBI investigations into the 9/11 attacks, the Justice Department sought to look into any leads, via voluntary interviews, that could surface within large Muslim population of Dearborn, Michigan.<sup>8</sup> This contributed to the increase in tensions among the Islamic population of Dearborn. The community said they felt their patriotism for America was in question and they could not be trusted.<sup>9</sup> Since 2002, the FBI has utilized other

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<sup>3</sup> Carter D. (2004). Law Enforcement Intelligence: A Guide for State, Local, and Tribal Law Enforcement Agencies. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Surveys.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Henderson, Nicole J., Ortiz, Christopher W., Surgie, Naomi F., and Miller, Joel (2006) Law Enforcement and Arab American Community Relationships After September 11, 2001, pg. 3

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. pg. 5

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. pg. 4

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. pg 3

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. pg 3

approaches to develop leads in terrorist investigations. A controversial approach is their use of informants within the Muslim community.

In 2009, FBI Director Robert Mueller defended his agency's use of informants within U.S. Mosques to report on specific Islamic leaders and worshippers. Director Mueller said "We don't investigate places, we investigate individuals." He also stated "to the extent that there may be evidence or other information of criminal wrongdoings, then we undertake those investigations."<sup>10</sup> This is but one approach law enforcement has used; for the FBI, the tactic may work. For local law enforcement, though, it may not be as effective as other means to sustain community engagement.

#### A STRATEGIC COMMUNITY RESPONSE

After the attacks on 9/11, the Monrovia Police Department in Southern California felt it could not ignore its role in homeland security. Because the agency is small (with sixty officers), management staff brainstormed possible courses of action. Since this agency was known for its local successes in Community Policing, the Chief of Police elected to continue that approach to deal with homeland security issues. In 2002, the Chief decided the Department would make a concerted effort to establish rapport and understanding with the local Muslim community.

Prior to the outreach effort, the only contact officers had with the Muslims was when they responded to the local mosque on a call for service. The Community Policing Bureau Sergeant saw an opportunity to increase the level of contact. The Department already had a great working relationship with other religious groups in the city, so the sergeant proposed a similar outreach to the Muslim community, which (state the size,

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<sup>10</sup> Associated Press; *FBI and Terrorism*; Fox News.com, June 8, 2009.

number of Mosques, or other means for the reader to know how many you have, etc. without it, they might just think you had 3 families, etc. put it here and move on).

The sergeant met with the Imam of the local Mosque and explained the Department sought to have a transparent relationship of trust and understanding in light of recent global events. The hope for both was that more open communication would better assist the department to provide excellent service to not only the Muslim community, but the entire city. The Imam was so pleased with this gesture that he opened up his services and educational resources to any officers that wanted to know more about Islam, whether they were Muslim or not. This became the start of a solid relationship between the department and the Muslim community. The Imam, Community Policing Sergeant and different officers met on a regular basis to learn the intricacies of the Muslim religion and brainstorm how to better include the Muslim community into regular community events. The meetings continue to this day, and many in the Department and community credit these meetings for the positive relationship they now enjoy.

Since forming a close connection with the Muslim community, the possibility of misunderstanding between officers and the Muslim community has lessened. It has also aided in the investigations of hate crimes directed towards the Muslim community. The open dialog created enough trust with members of the Mosque that a spirit of partnership has evolved that would aid in the maintenance of providing a safe and law abiding atmosphere for all members. A good example of this is the inclusion of the Imam into the department's Chaplin Corps.

By becoming a member of the Department, the Imam's work has greatly diminished any apprehension by his community. Additionally, after being educated in the basics of the Muslim religion, some officers now stop by the Mosque after prayers are concluded as part of their daily patrol to converse and have a cup of tea with community members. This highly successful first-front approach by the Department set the stage for more direct homeland security efforts; most prominently, the Department's participation in the region's Joint Terrorism Task Force.

#### JTTF's – Global and Local

The second front in the approach is to foster and cultivate a strong cooperative relationship with the different law enforcement and intelligence agencies within the framework of Homeland Security. One of the most opportune ways to accomplish this is through the involvement with the region's Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTF).

JTTFs were organized for the purpose of combining all resources (local, state and federal) to take action against terrorism, including investigations of wire fraud and identity theft.<sup>11</sup> JTTFs analyze various incidents, crimes and intelligence to determine terrorist activity and viability. The multiagency organization also hosts training in terrorist activity detection and funding operations on a quarterly basis to keep member investigators up to date.

Administrators and investigators must keep in mind that unlike the typical violent crime that occurs in metropolitan life, terrorism is aimed at making a statement. One of the most obvious examples is attacks on 9/11, perpetrated by radical Muslim extremists. Planning, recruiting and the commission of smaller crimes such as fraud or theft can lead

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<sup>11</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation; *Protecting America Against Terrorist Attack, A Closer Look at the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Forces*; <http://www.fbi.gov/page2/dec04/jttf120114.htm> .

up to one devastating event. Another example was when FBI agents arrested and charged eighteen individuals with smuggling contraband cigarettes from North Carolina to Michigan in July 2000.<sup>12</sup>

These individuals were discovered to be members of Hezbollah. Their activities intended to fund weapons and aid needed for the terrorist organization and its activities worldwide.<sup>13</sup> In this case, local law enforcement's contact with the suspects, their observations and assistance to federal agents was a key element to the subsequent arrests. This exemplifies that only through concentrated, detailed observation and culmination of information can local law enforcement take advantage of its position as the "point" of discovery in providing homeland security. Local agencies, no matter how large or small, can and must work to defuse potentially dangerous, devastating terrorist attacks.

In Monrovia's case, any smaller agency can enhance their efforts to address homeland security concerns by becoming more involved in their Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) as well as other law enforcement agencies and intelligence groups. In Monrovia, this coordinated effort resulted in open communications, greater community trust and an atmosphere where members of the Mosque freely assisted in several Homeland Security investigations.

It is important to note that Monrovia could not staff a position in the JTTF fulltime. Even though the Department did not have the resources to staff a Terrorism Liaison Officer position in the JTTF, they created a position in the agency for that purpose. The Detective Bureau Commander also attends regular meetings at the JTTF and coordinates any significant information between the two organizations. After

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<sup>12</sup> United States v. Mohammad Youssef Hammoud et al., No. 00 CR 147 (W.D.N.C filed July 2000, amended March 28, 2001), Superseding Bill of Indictment, paragraph 3.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

coordination was established, Monrovia's Terrorism Liaison Officer introduced a FBI Special Agent from the local JTTF to the Imam. By doing this, the spirit of community partnership in providing a safe environment was reinforced with the Imam.

The Imam felt more at ease not only with the police, but with the FBI. By openly bringing together the police, Muslim community and the FBI, a sense of teamwork in the pursuit of security and understanding was developed. Any investigations that came about involving individuals visiting the Mosque were quickly aided by these relationships.

#### An Expert Panel Weighs In

An expert panel gathered in September 2009 to study the issue of the connection between the local Muslim community and law enforcement's role in Homeland Security. Several identified possible avenues to benefit law enforcement and the Islamic community. Some of these were to commit to an outreach to 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Muslims here in the community, and to undertake cultural education and awareness for all police personnel.<sup>14</sup>

Law enforcement agencies have taken a community policing approach in a variety of circumstances for years. Undertaking this same path with the Islamic community would only continue to foster a sense of partnership. The Muslim peace officer on the expert panel felt mutual understanding was the key for both the police and the Muslim community. He also advocated that if more members of the community felt accepted and not stereotyped, stronger cooperation would be if some sort of criminal activity was present. The other members of the panel also agreed that communication and developed partnerships were the keys to success. Certainly, others have also adopted this approach.

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<sup>14</sup> Abdeen, Mike; Sergeant; Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department Muslim Affairs Unit; September 30, 2009.

Both the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department and the Dearborn Police Department utilize their Muslim Affairs Units to remain involved with their respective Muslim communities to build trust and understanding.<sup>15</sup> As a result, these agencies are regularly invited to Muslim community events as a sign of goodwill. In the case of the Los Angeles Sheriffs department, Sergeant Mike Abdeen, head of the Muslim Affairs Unit, says the levels of trust and dialog is on a constant rise due to the regular interaction between deputies and Muslims, especially an Imam.<sup>16</sup>

For those considering similar outreach, it is important to note the Imam is the key to success. In the Muslim religion, the Imam is a respected leader in the Mosque, and is responsible for leading daily prayers. According to the Muslim peace officer on the expert panel, the trust of the local Islamic community can be attained through the Imam. The Muslim peace officer also indicated that the law-abiding Muslim would feel more at ease in taking ownership in community safety and cooperate freely when they become aware of serious crimes about to be perpetrated in their community.<sup>17</sup>

Police agencies can also strengthen their relationship with the local Muslim community through awareness and education efforts for the street level officer. As in all training, the purpose and scope must be explained to achieve buy in, not only from line level personnel, but from policy makers. The development of a curriculum can be accomplished through the cooperative work of law enforcement personnel and community members of the Muslim faith. Topics such as history, origins and customs would be highly beneficial. The City of Monrovia accomplished this training through its

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Abdeen, Mike; Sergeant; Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department, Muslim Affairs Unit; September 30, 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

Community Activist Bureau beginning in the fall of 2002. This training is still ongoing and is delivered at recurring quarterly trainings for the Police Department.<sup>18</sup>

#### Conclusion

A smaller police agency can have an influence Homeland Security. The Monrovia Police Department's efforts in this area have proven very successful in several investigations, and the collaborative effort with the local Muslim community has paid dividends in terms of trust and cooperation. For those of us who work in small agencies, we must always have the foresight and diligence to embrace new collaboration and ideas to protect our citizens and nation. The dual-front approach is one way, and a way worth considering.

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<sup>18</sup> Sanvictores, Alan; Captain; Monrovia Police Department; 2010.

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