

CONNECTING

THE DOTS FOR A PROACTIVE APPROACH

By Matthew C. Scheider, Robert E. Chapman and Michael F. Seelman

Photo by Andrea Booher/FEMA News Photo

Community policing strategies for preventing and responding to terrorism.

The community policing philosophy is an important resource for preparing for and responding to acts of terrorism. While there is no one commonly recognized definition of community policing, here we present one possible definition that will be applied to preventing and responding to terrorist events. The definition is not meant to be proscriptive, but rather to offer some examples of the ways in which community policing can be implemented in local police departments and how they apply to terrorism related issues.

Community policing can be defined as a philosophy that focuses on crime and social disorder through the delivery of police services that includes aspects of traditional law enforcement, as well as prevention, problem-solving tactics and partnerships. A fundamental shift from traditional, reactive

policing, community policing stresses the prevention of crime before it occurs and requires police and citizens to join together as partners in the course of both identifying and effectively addressing the underlying conditions that give rise to crime and disorder. The community policing philosophy can be roughly divided into three inter-related elements – organizational, tactical and external. Each of these elements will be discussed briefly and applied to the issues of terrorism prevention and response.

Organizational elements

There are a variety of organizational practices that can support community policing and in turn facilitate efforts to improve homeland security. These practices include adopting the community policing philosophy organization-wide, decentralizing decision-

making and accountability, fixing geographic accountability and generalist responsibilities, utilizing volunteer resources and employing other enhancers.

Adopting the community policing philosophy organization-wide

In the ideal case, the community policing philosophy should be adopted organization-wide and be reflected through department participation at all levels, as well as through the organization's mission, goals, objectives, policies and procedures, performance evaluations, training programs, and hiring and promotion practices.

Adoption of the community policing philosophy partly involves reengineering department processes and resources away from randomness and reactivity, and towards information and service-driven, community-

based approaches. Departments that have fully embraced the community policing philosophy should also be more effective in addressing the terrorism crime problem. They should have the skills to analyze the terrorism problem, perform a threat analysis, develop appropriate responses and reflect these efforts in the mission, goals and objectives of the department. This will ensure a department-wide coordinated terrorism prevention and reduction strategy.

Decentralizing decision-making and accountability

In community policing, individual officers are given the authority to solve problems and make operational decisions suitable to their roles. Leadership and initiative is required and rewarded at every level, with managers, supervisors and line officers held accountable for decisions and the effects of their efforts at solving problems and reducing crime and disorder with the community.

A flatter decision-making structure may ensure more effective terrorism prevention and response. Empowering officers at lower levels may help them feel free to pursue leads or suspected terrorist activity. Imbuing them with decision-making authority and familiarizing them with making and taking responsibility for important decisions could be of value in any crisis.

Fixing geographic accountability and generalist responsibilities

In community policing, the majority of staffing, command, deployment and tactical decision-making are geographically based. Appropriate personnel are assigned to fixed geographic areas for extended periods of time in order to foster communication and partnerships between individual officers and their community, and are accountable for reducing crime and disorder within their assigned area. The geographic boundaries are naturally determined based more on communities rather than statistical divisions.

Having fixed-geographic responsibility often allows officers to develop more productive relationships with members of the communities in which they serve, and therefore may assist officers in the identification of possible terrorist threats.

Utilizing volunteer resources

Community policing encourages the use of non-law enforcement resources within a law enforcement agency. The law enforcement organization educates the public about ways they can partner with the organization and its members to further community policing, and provides an effective means for citizen input. Volunteer efforts can help free up officer time, and allow sworn personnel to be more proactive and prevention oriented. Examples of such resources might include police reserves, volunteers, Explorer Scouts, service organizations and citizen or youth police academies.

In these times, many citizens are looking for an outlet to “do something.” Citizen volunteers can be a valuable asset in preventing and responding to acts of terrorism. They can assist law enforcement in gathering valuable information through neighborhood watches and support sworn law enforcement officers through a police auxiliary. In addition, communities can

organize a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program to help train people to be better prepared to respond to emergency situations in their communities. CERT members can give critical support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims and organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site. The Citizen Corps web site (www.citizencorps.gov) provides more information about establishing CERTs and other volunteer public safety programs.

Employing enhancers

There are a number of enhancers and facilitators that may assist departments in their transition to community policing. For example, updated technology and information systems can facilitate community policing and, in turn, terrorism prevention and response by providing officers access to crime and incident data that supports problem analysis or increases uncommitted officer time by reducing time spent on administrative duties. This can result in officer time-savings and enhanced analytical capabilities that allow the agency to gather timely information about terrorism issues, which supports better resource and personnel deployment. For example, 311 non-emergency call centers were invaluable to many agencies in the immediate aftermath of September 11. These systems were used to



CERT members can give critical support to first responders, provide immediate assistance to victims and organize spontaneous volunteers at a disaster site





disseminate accurate information to the public, alleviating public fear by dispelling unfounded rumors, and they often greatly reduced the burden on 911 emergency systems.

Community policing training for all sworn and civilian personnel can also serve as a facilitator to successful implementation of the

philosophy. Training opportunities support community policing through the presentation of alternative means of enforcing the law and impacting crime and disorder problems.

Community policing training should be incorporated into all facets of training, required for all department personnel,

available to the community and expanded well beyond the definition and basic elements.

Community policing training is available to state and local law enforcement and community members through the Department of Justice COPS Office Regional Community Policing Institutes (www.cops.usdoj.gov).

“

An officer in a department that fully embraces the community policing philosophy would know of potential terrorist targets in his jurisdiction because he has been assigned a regular patrol area and given the responsibility and authority to protect it

”

Applying community policing organizational elements in counterterrorism

An officer in a department that fully embraces the community policing philosophy would know of potential terrorist targets in his jurisdiction because he has been assigned a regular patrol area and given the responsibility and authority to protect it. The potential target might be a scientific facility that uses animal testing, a busy airport, a company warehouse that stores hazardous chemicals near a port facility or a border crossing area. The officer would have a relationship with the facility

owners and discuss how to use crime prevention through environmental design and other target hardening methods to protect the facility. They could discuss how to spot and report suspicious activity and the owners would likely feel more comfortable bringing terrorist threats to the officer's attention. During times of an elevated threat, the officer could bring in police reserves and other volunteers to help guard the facility. Finally, the police department could partner with other appropriate law enforcement agencies to train the facility staff as to what to do in the event of a terrorist attack and conduct joint mock exercises.

Tactical elements

The tactical elements of community policing involve enforcing existing laws, informing about the development of new laws, preventing incidents through proactive and crime prevention-oriented activities and using problem-solving strategies to address community problems. Each element is outlined below and put in a terrorism context.

Informing about the development of new laws and enforcing laws

Police departments should be active partners in working with lawmakers and members of the community to discuss improved means to enforce existing laws and to identify laws that need to be amended or enacted. These activities allow police agencies to assist in the development of more effective laws and in the more strategic enforcement of them.

Clearly, terrorism prevention and response activities involves the enforcement of existing laws, whether they be immigration laws, possession of explosives or weapons ordinances, bank and wire fraud, etc. In addition, the war on terrorism has recently led to changes in laws at the federal and (in some cases) at the local level. For example, some laws that have recently been passed are described as involving a broadening of police powers. A community policing philosophy emphasizes that local

police and community members should both be involved in the creation or modification of these laws. Law enforcement can provide expertise regarding how laws are actually implemented and citizens can provide perspectives on how possible legal changes will be perceived by the community. Incorporating both of these perspectives can greatly enhance the probability that laws will have their desired outcomes and can be effectively enforced.

Being proactive and crime prevention-oriented

Departments are highly reactive under the traditional model of policing. Law enforcement responds to calls for service from citizens and focuses primarily on arresting offenders after crimes have been committed. Under community policing, law enforcement focuses not only on enforcement, but also on crime prevention and proactively addressing the underlying conditions that give rise to crime and disorder. The community actively engages in collaborating on prevention and problem-solving activities with a goal of reducing victimization and fear of crime.

Using problem-solving strategies

While enforcement is an integral part of policing, problem-solving relies less heavily on use of the traditional criminal justice system components and enforcement methods and more on preventing crime through collaborative problem solving. This is accomplished through the identification and analysis of problems and by developing tailored strategies that may include both traditional and non-traditional responses. These responses focus on deterring offenders, protecting likely victims, and making locations less conducive to crime and disorder.

Using tactical community policing elements to fight terrorism

Problem-solving models – such as scanning, analysis, response and assessment

(SARA) – are well suited to the prevention and response of terrorist activity. Departments can utilize many existing data sources ahead of time to develop detailed risk management and crisis plans. Identification (scanning) of potential terrorist targets in local jurisdictions is an important first step. Police can determine which possible sites in their jurisdictions (i.e. dams, electric grids, chemical warehouses, transportation centers, large-scale public gatherings, etc.) are potential terrorist targets. Problem-solving then encourages agencies to conduct complex analyses of the possible threats, their relative likelihood of occurrence and the potential impact of possible responses (analysis). Agencies are then encouraged to work in conjunction with other government, social and community entities to develop detailed crisis response and prevention plans (response). Finally, the continual refinement of these plans to suit changing conditions and threat levels through the use of drills and regular response reviews are encouraged (assessment).

External elements

Community policing strongly encourages engaging the community in the war against terrorism. External community policing elements recognize that the police cannot solve community crime and disorder and terrorism related problems alone. The police are only one of a host of other local government agencies with responsibility for responding to community problems and dealing with terrorism and terrorism related issues. Police are encouraged to develop working partnerships with governmental, civic and other community groups to accurately survey community needs and priorities, to use the public as a resource in problem-solving efforts and in developing and implementing interventions.

Involving the public and fostering community partnerships

In community policing, citizens are viewed

by the police as partners who share responsibility for identifying priorities, and developing and implementing responses. Law enforcement can engage citizen groups as partners in problem solving, employ citizen volunteers in public safety activities and dialog with citizens about terrorist threats through a comprehensive communication strategy.

The threat of terrorism provides a unique opportunity to create partnerships and exchange information with citizens. The community policing model encourages the development of such ongoing and effective partnerships. These partnerships can be invaluable in the prevention of terrorist activity because they can result in increased intelligence sharing, target hardening and improved coordinated responses to any actual terrorist events. They will have relationships with the community to enhance intelligence gathering efforts.

A comprehensive law enforcement communication strategy may include surveying customer needs and fears, working with the media to deliver timely messages and using presentations to community organizations. Accurate surveying of customer needs and priorities is important under community policing to determine the problems that drive police services, and give the public ownership of the problem-solving process. Law enforcement is also encouraged to view the media as a partner in communicating important terrorism-related information to the public as this often requires a delicate balance between sharing enough information with the public to ensure that they are adequately informed about potential threats, and sharing too much information.

Establishing government and other agency partnerships

The police are only one of the many local government agencies responsible for responding to community problems. Under community policing, other government agencies are called upon and recognized for their abilities to

respond to and address crime and social disorder issues. The support and leadership of elected officials, as well as the coordination of the police department at all levels, are vital to the success of these efforts.

Community policing encourages agencies to establish and expand upon existing partnerships with a goal of developing model crisis-plans and processes to deal with the aftermath of terrorist incidents that consider the abilities of multiple government agencies. Law enforcement and local government should join with community partners to develop a plan on how to prepare for such a crisis in advance, what to do in the event of such a crisis and how to cope with its aftermath. A large number of government and private and public agencies should be involved in terrorism prevention and response plans. For example, hospitals, public works agencies, transportation agencies, water supply and management organizations, environmental protection agencies, border security agencies, etc. can all bring a variety of resources and perspectives to bear on terrorism prevention and response planning activities. Private security forces can also play an important role in supporting counterterrorism efforts through target hardening, site evacuations, emergency management in their facilities and providing additional intelligence information.

In addition, the prevention and response to terrorism often requires a regional approach and robust information-sharing. More often than not, one law enforcement agency will not be able to uncover and address terrorist operations or financing solely with the information available within their jurisdiction. They need to join in partnerships with other local and federal agencies through Joint Terrorism Task Forces and other regional approaches to “connect the dots.”

Employing external elements to prevent and respond to terrorism

Imagine a scenario where there is a suspected

bioterrorist attack. A law enforcement agency that practices community policing would be more effective in marshalling external resources in a coordinated response. The agency will have developed the partnerships and channels of communication well in advance of any crisis. The law enforcement agency would already have met with public health officials to establish relationships and work out emergency plans. The agency would understand the critical importance of acting quickly to contain the spread of the any contagion and would work in unison with the public health officials to reassure the public. Law enforcement could activate CERT teams to assist in the public health emergency and treating any exposed community members. Local media outlets would have been pre-briefed on the dangers of biological agents and effective law enforcement responses. They would assist the government agencies in addressing fears and directing the public response.

Conclusion

For the past 20 years, community policing has encouraged law enforcement to partner with the community to proactively identify potential threats and create a climate of safety. Its emphasis on problem-solving has led to more effective means of addressing crime and social disorder problems. In the 21st Century the community policing philosophy is well positioned to take a central role in preventing and responding to terrorism and in efforts to reduce citizen fear. Law enforcement agencies should realize that community policing is more important than ever in pro-actively dealing with and responding to terrorism in their jurisdictions. ■

Matthew C. Scheider PhD, Robert E. Chapman and Michael F. Seelman are Social Science Analysts with the US Department of Justice, Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, in Washington, DC.

The points of view and opinions expressed in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of the US Department of Justice.