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A Tale of Two Cities

Oakland & San Francisco's Approach to Crime & Economic Constraints

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What is the best way to deliver public safety services in tough economic times? How does order maintenance affect crime rates and municipal budgets? These questions are at the core of a dilemma facing police administrators and city managers in contemporary America. The approach taken by two cities are instructive to these larger questions.

I predicted these economic and operational tensions facing policing agencies in the late 1990's, while researching my doctoral dissertation.¹ My theory was that policing agencies were overworked, understaffed, and underfunded. The "solution" was either one of two options: more money or less work. I asserted that money would not be available. The only viable answer is to shift many order maintenance functions to alternative service providers. Simply put: service requests burden police departments. Why should police officers answer burglar alarm calls, respond to "paper jobs" to report lost or stolen property, stand post at a crime scene, write parking tickets, or perform routine patrol? We once were able to afford these tasks, but we cannot afford to anymore.

Current economic times and substantial budget deficits are having great impact on police operations. Police departments all over the country are cash strapped. Lay-offs of police officers are becoming increasingly common--and deep. For example, 80 Oakland police officers were recently laid off, fully 10% of the force. Service and operational cuts are also included.

San Francisco

In an attempt to deal with budget constraints, the San Francisco Police Department plans to hire civilians who will be trained for routine police work. These individuals will be civilian employees of the city. This initiative will commence under a six-month \$955,000 pilot program starting in January 2011.

Under this pilot program, fifteen civilian investigators, who would cost about half as much as sworn officers, will be assigned to respond to routine and non-emergency cases. They will be trained to collect evidence, conduct interviews and photograph crime scenes. It is hoped they will speed up response time, save money, and free up sworn officers, so they can focus on more important things.² "It has the possibility to keep armed police officers on the street to respond to violent crimes much more quickly," says San Francisco police commissioner Jim Hammer. He added: "if it gets into any

¹ The dissertation was published by McFarland & Company. Pastor, James F (2003) [*The Privatization of Police in America: An Analysis and Case Study.*](#)

² Kim, Lilian (2010) @ http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/local/san_francisco&id=7574510 on July 25, 2010.

more serious kinds of crimes or involved interviews, I think only highly trained police officers and investigators with a lot of experience ought to be doing those types of interviews.”³

Oakland

The approach by Oakland is quite different. Their approach was twofold: hire private security and foster volunteers. Indeed, the Oakland chapter of the Guardian Angels provides volunteer patrols designed to help keep the peace. The group stated, “Now is the time for all Oakland residents to get involve and help Oakland with safety measures... Let's keep crime off our streets.”⁴

The more concrete approach being used by Oakland is also more controversial. That is using private security patrols in public environments. In doing so, Oakland is joining other cities that are turning over some traditional policing duties to armed private security. City leaders say that their record budget deficit left them few options to reduce the city’s violence.

In the wake of eliminating 80 police officers, some neighborhoods, such as Chinatown, are leading a new trend in the crime-ridden city: an increase in privately financed public safety. The layoffs, which helped close a budget deficit of more than \$30 million, eliminated the community-policing program that assigned officers to walk their beats and attend neighborhood meetings. Now some residents are pooling resources to restore a law-enforcement presence.⁵

“We need a cost-effective answer to the crime we are facing,” said Ignacio De La Fuente, a City Council member who has led the push for armed guards. He added that he is confident the security company’s armed guards, who will have state certified public safety training, are up for the task of “policing” the streets of Oakland.⁶

Most would agree that hiring security officers are less expensive than hiring new police officers. Oakland spends about 65% of its budget for police and fire services, including about \$250,000 annually for each police officer (includes salary, benefits and overhead). In contrast, for about \$200,000 a year, the city contracted to hire four security officers to patrol a troubled district where four on-duty police officers were killed.⁷

Best Practice Solutions

These brief examples are illustrative of a larger trend. They demonstrate the need to find ways to shift work product to “alternative service providers.” Here are the options:

³ Ibid.

⁴ Preuitt, Lori (2010). Guardian Angels to Hit Streets of Oakland @ <http://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local-beat/Guardian-Angels-To-Hit-Streets-of-Oakland-98707789.html> on July 18, 2010.

⁵ Parks, Richard (2010). In Oakland, Private Force May Be Hired for Security @ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/13/us/13bcsecurity.html?_r=1 on August 13, 2010.

⁶ White, Bobby (2009). Cash-Strapped Cities Try Private Guards Over Police. *Wall Street Journal* @ http://online.wsj.com/article/NA_WSJ_PUB:SB124027127337237011.html on April 21, 2009.

⁷ Ibid.

ORDER MAINTENANCE PROVISIONS



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This diagram depicts “who” will perform the services historically provided by police officers. I use the term “Order Maintenance” to describe the provision of crime control and reporting services. This entails anything from report taking, ticket writing, crime scene security and processing, alarm response, and handling of other “lower level” incidents.

Of course, public police officers will always perform order maintenance tasks. It is inevitable. Volunteers may also act as the “eyes and ears” of the police. Similarly, many police departments use “Reserve or Auxiliary” police. These are sworn police officers. But they are only “part-time” employees, or they are used for special events. They are sometimes paid for their services, while some do so as volunteers.

The San Francisco described above approach relates to the general term of “CSO's” (meaning Community Service Officers). The police call it “civilianization.” They are not sworn police officers, but are employed by the department for specific “lower level” tasks. These civilians are less trained, make less money, and derive fewer benefits than police officers.

The last option is, in my mind, the best option. This relates to “para-police” or “special police.” This recognizes that police need “para-professionals” to perform lower skill functions for lower costs. This model is similar to the medical and legal professions, where “para-medics” and “para-legals” provide cost effective and necessary services. They do so without the same level of experience, credentials, and skills as their professional counter-parts. Similarly, “para-police” act as supplements to the police.

A classic example of para-police is the Patrol Special Police. They are regulated by the San Francisco Police Commission. Since the time of the “gold rush,” they have served San Francisco. They are private entrepreneurs, who “own” their beats, contracting directly with clients, typically business owners, within the particular beat. These officers are annually trained according to standards set by the police department. This includes class room instruction and firearm range

training. Officers operate on the police radio frequency. They are armed with handguns, handcuffs and other police equipment.⁸

Despite the long standing existence of these officers, San Francisco city officials are not expanding their ranks or functions. Instead they are emphasizing the “civilian investigators.” In this way, they have apparently chosen the government centered, instead of the market centered, approach to order maintenance. As will be made plain below, this is a critical distinction.

The more common use of para-police officers entail those employed by private firms. They are assigned to specific posts or patrols pursuant to service agreements with private entities, such as Business Improvement Districts (BID’s), property associations, block clubs, or any other group that seeks supplemental public safety and security services. In some cases, government entities also contract with private firms for order maintenance services.

The overall benefits of para-police are two fold: direct relationship to their respective “clients” and cost reduction. The relationships with clients far exceed anything police can accomplish under the Community Policing model. Space does not allow a full discussion of this assertion. Suffice to say this; citizens cannot “fire” their police, but “clients” can. With this option, who do you think will receive better client satisfaction?

Beyond this factor, the cost of these services is far less than municipal police officers. This is similar to civilianization, but with one critical distinction: civilians are paid by the government (meaning by taxpayers). Para-police are typically paid by clients. In this way, these costs are outside the municipal budget. They are directly paid by the people who receive the services. Of course, this is attractive to strained municipalities. They can reduce their budgets while not adversely affecting the service provision to citizens and to public safety within their communities.

While I am a strong supporter of the police, current fiscal problems are driving innovation. In the end, you cannot stop people from buying their own security. The fear of crime and terrorism will drive these decisions. Considering the many variations of order maintenance, in my mind, the best approach is to supplement police officers with para-police.

I believe the answer is clear--change the model of policing.⁹ The use of para-police to perform supplemental policing services is at hand. While there are many pitfalls and challenges to this policing model, the trend toward this transition is accelerating.

In the end, consider that the Chinese language uses the same word to describe two seemingly disconnected concepts: crisis and opportunity. Upon deeper reflection, however, the concepts are the same. Crisis will always create opportunity. Those who are creative and prepared will benefit from opportunities created by a crisis. The security industry, and individual security professionals, has a unique opportunity to fill the void left by policing agencies. The time for change has come!

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⁸ See http://www.sfspecialneighborhoodpolicing.org/about_us.html and http://www.sfspecialneighborhoodpolicing.org/our_history.html

⁹ My new book: *Terrorism and Public Safety Policing: Implications for the Obama Presidency* develops a new model of policing, I call "Public Safety Policing."