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THE IMPACT OF ADDITIONAL POLICE

*Patrick V. Murphy**

I. INTRODUCTION

The centerpiece of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 is the hiring of 100,000 additional police officers to do community policing. The 1994 Crime Act provides a federal incentive to cities to fundamentally change the way they are policed, especially in the inner cities where murder rates are often fifty or more times those in nearby neighborhoods. Additional officers are the vehicle for achieving the goal of replacing ineffective methods with productive strategies. After thirty years of law enforcement assistance programs, the Department of Justice has finally been given a leadership opportunity to improve local policing's basic methods. The success of this crime act should be measured by the extent of change from the old police-dominated approach to the new approach—one of leveraging the indispensable participation of every neighborhood community in crime prevention. A partnership between people and their own neighborhood officer can reduce crime. The police alone cannot.

Beyond sending many thousands of checks annually to subsidize police hiring, the Justice Department, through technical assistance, research and dissemination components, can foster the exchange of ideas and personnel. Almost all officers, including police chiefs, spend their entire careers in only one department. They are handicapped by their limited experience and lack of exposure to other traditions, philosophies and policies. A management exchange program for administrators and overseers—mayors, city managers, and their assistants—should be a high priority. As better methods are learned and transferred, the effectiveness of participating departments will improve. Exchange managers will have their minds stretched. Exposure, for the first time, to variations in organization, management and practice will generate a new inclination to challenge entrenched policies. Hands-on experience in a different police environment will expedite the discarding of many myths and untested assumptions which typically underlie widespread flawed practices. If police departments are able to learn from each other, crime will decline significantly.

Eighty percent of the people in this country favor the hiring of more police, although social and economic injustice have more to do with crime than the

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quantity of criminal justice expenditures for police, courts or prisons. More of the same policing is not the answer. Better policing is a major component of the solution. It would include, rather than exclude, the people who are the principal element of crime prevention. Enlightened police leadership has recently developed in support of gun control and prevention programs in the 1994 Crime Act. That same encouraging progress toward professionalism will educate the public, as the police should, to the truths of crime control:

- High unemployment rates in inner cities are a manifestation of national stupidity. The high price in violence, crime, fear, divisiveness, incarceration and taxes far exceed the cost of a federal government solution. High crime and imprisonment rates make dependents of young men who should be productive, thereby reducing our international economic competitiveness;
- Suburbanites deceive themselves in supporting federal and state government neglect of the cities—a basic cause of high crime rates;
- A twenty-first century society that permits the rich to get richer while the poor grow poorer sows the seeds of overwhelmingly expensive yet avoidable problems for its next generation.

II. THE CRIME PROBLEM

High rates of poverty and unemployment correlate with higher rates of violent crime when large numbers of residents suffering from such disadvantages are concentrated in inner cities. Unemployed young men are easily attracted to crime as an alternative source of income. Jobs offer the best solution to the crime problem. Even so, the police can play an important role in alleviating the consequences of social or economic injustice. On the other hand, if the police fail to function as they should in a democratic society, crime, disorder and fear will worsen. The level of violent crime is determined by its root causes in combination with the strength, or weakness, of a community in exercising social control. A poor neighborhood with a strong sense of community—with friendliness, effective leaders, and mutually protective, helping, economically supportive, and enforcing standards of behavior—can be more effective in preventing criminals from making a bad situation worse. The strength of cooperation, pride in one's neighborhood, and a determination to protect that neighborhood can deter criminals from further victimizing poor people. However, the assistance of the police is critically important in forming a partnership with people that is tougher than any criminal or gang.

III. CRIME AND THE POLICE

The proper role of the police in a free society, as distinguished from a police state, is to assist the people to prevent and reduce crime. Unfortunately, the police tend not to assist the people but to function independently. Motorized

“preventative” patrolling with minimal citizen interaction has been the almost universal method of policing for forty years. Research has shown it has no significant impact on crime. Yet it prevails. Myths die hard in a world that is not research oriented.

The police are more essential in a democracy than is generally understood. In fact, the police themselves do not appreciate one of their fundamental responsibilities—the protection of the constitutional rights of the people to govern themselves, although they swear to uphold the constitution.

Chiefs and officers are clear about enforcing the law and making arrests when they have sufficient evidence for a *prima facie* case. As a matter of fact, arrests tend to be overemphasized as a measure of effectiveness, regardless of their quality. Prevention is neglected. The failure to prevent crime, or even to focus on prevention, deprives many Americans in poor neighborhoods of the right to govern their own streets for the protection of life and property.

Charles Reich, the English police historian, refers to the police as the “germ of democracy.” This characterization is especially true concerning the poor. The middle class depends on the police much less than the poor. They have more social, economic, and political power to provide for their safety. Their neighbors’ economic security minimizes the temptation to turn to crime. The powerlessness of the poor in all three respects exposes them to the violence and thievery of criminal gangs and individuals. Police are indifferent to the rights of the poor as full-fledged citizens entitled to control their streets and neighborhood, to receive their full share of protection and to hold their police accountable. For example, a chief should respond with a passion for justice by assigning numbers of officers to neighborhoods in accordance with their crime rate as determined by a seriousness index. By that standard, most cities provide a relative excess of protection to the affluent and middle class while neglecting the safety of the poor. A conscientious chief should speak out against the social and economic injustices resulting from the greed that deprives fellow citizens of the minimum of human dignity that requires an income above the poverty level. Those same fellow citizens contribute well beyond their share in life and limb in defending the nation when it is threatened.

Professor Egon Bittner of Brandeis University refers to policing as vocation of service to the poor. They depend on the officers who protect them to, not only keep them safe, but to assist them by insuring they are full participants in government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

IV. THE NON-SYSTEM

American policing is uniquely local. It has not been systematized. It is a fragmented, insular non-system. There are more than 15,000 agencies. They are extremely isolated from one another. The exchange of ideas, policies and criminal intelligence is severely limited. Careers are confined to one department almost without exception. No profession has developed although there is a clear need for a fully professional entry standard for every officer given law

enforcement authority. States have failed to do enough to upgrade, coordinate and set standards for local policing within their borders. Fifteen thousand local departments cannot work successfully without a comprehensive national support structure of planning, coordination, intelligence, statistics, research, experimentation, demonstrations, technical assistance, training, education, personnel exchanges and standards. The federal government fails to provide anything resembling an adequate backup system. The entire police service suffers as a result. The American people are victimized by excessive crime, fear and drug trafficking.

The 1967 report of a President's Crime Commission recommended a four year college degree as the entry standard for all officers with law enforcement authority. Each has unique power in detaining, arresting, investigating, surveilling, accessing confidential records and wiretapping. Each has broad discretion beyond that of many professionals. Despite this power, it is estimated that only approximately fifteen percent of current officers possess a baccalaureate.

Lacking professional development and an adequate body of knowledge, the police continue to function in a hit or miss fashion. Wide variations are found in policies, methods, personnel practices and accountability to the people among the thousands of autonomous jurisdictions. Elected and appointed officials responsible for performance are at a serious disadvantage in attempting to evaluate methods.

V. FEDERAL RESPONSIBILITY AND OPPORTUNITY

Every president and governor reminds us that crime is a local problem. It is a state and national problem as well. Its costs are highest in large cities, but states and the nation also pay too high a price. To bring the horrendous crime problem under reasonable control will require, among other national initiatives, that the federal government assist, back up and provide intellectual leadership to police departments in the principal cities. Village and small town police function satisfactorily. Few have heavy concentrations of poverty and unemployment. By virtue of their size they practice friendly, community policing. Officers are not strangers to the people as large city police too often are.

Sixty years ago the Federal Bureau of Investigation began its training program for state and local police. Bringing officers from large and small departments together for ten or twelve weeks of training has been very valuable. Even as the level of education has risen and states have set higher standards of training, the FBI National Academy provides a rare opportunity for the exchange of ideas. Not all who attend have the inquisitiveness to exploit the challenge to critically compare their agencies' organization, management and policies with those of other departments represented by their classmates. Those who do have such interest and ability contribute to the development of policing and are likely to advance their careers. The national fingerprint file, the National Crime Information Center and laboratory services are other examples of essential

federal government backup programs available to the local police through the FBI.

The War on Drugs, however, has not been conducted as a comprehensive, balanced campaign to minimize abuse and addiction as well as the violence, corruption and other crime generated by the enormous profits from the illicit traffic. The federal government has vastly increased the tax dollars devoted to federal law enforcement. Its interdiction efforts have had a low success rate. Relatively little assistance has been provided for state and local police. A misguided emphasis has been placed on enforcement while prevention and treatment have been neglected. Unlike federal law enforcement agencies, the police prevent crime, principally through a partnership with the community, the largest and most effective component of crime control. Communities, family, relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers, clergy, employers—can do more to reduce the demand for drugs than all law enforcement at every level of government.

Much of the traffic has been driven by recreational users who do not become addicted. Middle class users who do become addicted usually receive prompt treatment from their health insurance. Poor addicts typically wait long periods for inadequate treatment. While waiting, many commit considerable crime to support their habits.

The large growth in Drug War spending from 1986 to 1991, from \$2.4 to \$10.5 billion, was concentrated (73%) on enlarging federal law enforcement. High expectations for the potential of an enlarged Drug Enforcement Agency and FBI have resulted in disappointment. Focusing more on drug use than on violence has permitted an epidemic of youthful homicide to explode. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 reverses course. It properly prioritizes violence. It recognizes that the solution must come from the people, and that the police—not federal law enforcement—can mobilize the people. It recognizes the responsibility of the federal government—to assist the police and provide the research, knowledge and exchange of ideas they desperately need. It provides the Department of Justice with an unprecedented opportunity to upgrade the police service to empower the people to reduce crime.

Crime is a local problem. Although the federal government is not responsible for its control, it has a clear duty, through research and promoting the exchange of ideas, to provide intellectual leadership.