

Community Policing in Homeland Security

Author: Tommy L. Smith
American Military University

Created: April 11, 2018

Published April 11, 2018 by *Analyst Avenue*



Community Policing in Homeland Security

Community policing is a term that has become popular in the last decade or so, and police departments and sheriffs' offices across the country have begun using it not only in every day crime fighting, but also in homeland security/counter-domestic terrorism. As with any policing initiative, there are inherently going to be positive and negative aspects of the community policing approach. To kick things off, I'll first define what community policing is, then give a first-person account of how the community policing squads operated at the police department I formerly worked for. Finally, I'll provide some information from published works, specifically addressing policing in terrorism.

According to the Community Oriented Policing Services section of the United States Department of Justice, the leading authority on all things community policing:

Community policing emphasizes proactive problem solving in a systematic and routine fashion. Rather than responding to crime only after it occurs, community policing encourages agencies to proactively develop solutions to the immediate underlying conditions contributing to public safety problems. Problem solving must be infused into all police operations and guide decision-making efforts. Agencies are encouraged to think innovatively about their responses and view making arrests as only one of a wide array of potential responses. A major conceptual vehicle for helping officers to think about problem solving in a structured and disciplined way is the scanning, analysis, response, and assessment (SARA) model (Problem Solving, n.d.).

Judging by the definition from COPS provided above, we can see that community policing involves problem-solving, developing solutions, and recognizing underlying issues/problems – as opposed to simply responding to a crime and hopefully making an arrest. Essentially, this involves forming partnerships with the community and some actual investigative work. At my former employing agency, the Tallahassee Police Department in Florida, we had two (2) Community Oriented Policing & Problem Solving (COPPS) squads. The squads were assigned a particular zone for an extended period of time, whenever the Community Relations/Crime Prevention Unit or the Crime Analysis/Intelligence Unit determined there was either a crime or quality of life problem in the area. The COPPS members would work with the local residents in the communities, sometimes even helping residents paint over graffiti or mend actual fences. In my view, the entire reason for community policing is to engage WITH the members of the community and assist with things other than just crime-related issues. By doing this, officers gain a level of trust and respect among the residents of the communities, who then may open up and share information on wanted persons, drug sales, etc. that may be plaguing their areas. As a practical example, the little old lady at the end of the street almost always knows more about what's going on in the neighborhood than any police officer could discover on his own.

Dr. Stevan Weine, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Illinois in Chicago states that “terrorism is a global problem, but it is also a local one. Individual terrorists, particularly lone wolves, are often linked to their communities in terms of their resentments, ambitions, and targets” (2017). Additionally, he explains that it is important to counterterrorism efforts to make local communities comfortable with a steady law enforcement presence (2017). It is important for collaboration between local agencies and neighboring municipalities to occur, including

sharing a space for intelligence-sharing (Thomas, 2016) and/or participating in local or regional fusion center meetings. It is apparent from Dr. Weine's statements, that lone wolf terrorists have some things in common with gang members – they have ties to their local communities, and their resentments and targets are often other community members or members of nearby communities, some of whom may be rival gang members. Regardless of status (i.e. gang member or terrorist), crime problems always seem to originate in a local community or neighborhood. Typically, terrorists and criminals (whether or not they are gang members) become the way they are because of something that happened to them or because of something they feel that needs to be changed. The strain theory associates crime and delinquency with stress (Brezina, 2017) – this can be stress caused by an abusive home life, poverty, bullying, bad experiences in school or college, unhappiness at a job, or even blaming the government or an organization for one's misfortune. Stress creates negative emotions (i.e. frustration, depression, anger, etc.) and as a result, one may feel the need "rise above" or take corrective action, often resulting in criminal actions or delinquency (2017).

Understandably, the events of September 11, 2001 shook the United States government across all levels, and generated a principal concern for the future of national security – it's called homeland security. To maintain national security from within the United States, local law enforcement has become more and more proactive, utilizing predictive analytics to help forecast future occurrences and identify potential threats. The new policing model touches on crime prevention, intelligence gathering, and information sharing (Docobo, 2005). Certain software products have been invented post-9/11 which were originally designed for neighborhood and community events, then became a tool for law enforcement. Nextdoor is a "private, social network for the neighborhood" and is utilized by neighborhood watch groups to advertise a local

event, yard sale, or share safety tips (Nextdoor, n.d.). The Tallahassee Police Department's Community Relations/Crime Prevention Unit and the Leon County Sheriff's Office routinely use the Nextdoor application to connect with neighborhood watch group members and often receive tips regarding crime or quality of life issues in their respective areas. Additionally, the application allows law enforcement to share important updates regarding persons of interest or "lock your door" reminders.

The positive aspects of community policing in homeland security efforts would, at face value, seem to easily dispel any disbelief; however, some officers, commanders, and local officials believe that it is a "soft" option (Thomas, 2016). Because of this view, it is difficult to achieve agency-wide "buy-in" unless there is a clear plan in place. In order to fully implement this solution, the agency head must fully support and push the idea down the chain-of-command. Even with agency buy-in, city and county officials routinely present problems in how law enforcement bodies operate locally. Policing has historically been viewed as high speed chases and dramatic arrests, and the mainstream media and Hollywood productions have not done much to dissuade that idea. Because that is the type of behavior the general public expects, politicians sometimes expect police to operate by what they consider the "traditional" model with an emphasis on paramilitary style (Murray, 2006). Ultimately, regressing back to the traditional, strong-arm, and reactive model of policing would be counterproductive and relationships with the communities served may be negatively affected (2006).

References:

- Brezina, T. (2017-02-27). General Strain Theory. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Criminology*. Retrieved from <http://criminology.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190264079.001.0001/acrefore-9780190264079-e-249>.
- Docobo, J. (2005). Community Policing as the Primary Prevention Strategy for Homeland Security at the Local Law Enforcement Level. *Homeland Security Affairs*, 1 (4). Retrieved from <https://www.hsaj.org/articles/183>.
- Murray, J. (2006). Policing Terrorism: A Threat to Community Policing or Just in Shift in Priorities? *Policing Practice and Research Journal*, 6 (4), 347-361.
- Nextdoor. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://nextdoor.com/>.
- Problem Solving. (n.d.). Community Oriented Policing Services. DOJ. Retrieved from <https://cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=2558>.
- Weine, S. (2017). How Local Law Enforcement Uses Community Policing to Combat Terrorism. *Lawfare*. Retrieved from <https://www.lawfareblog.com/how-local-law-enforcement-uses-community-policing-combat-terrorism>.