

POLICING AND TERRORISM:

THE FRENCH (DIS)CONNECTION AND THE LESSONS FOR AMERICA

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Introduction

The Muslim youth riots of November 2005 raged throughout France over ten nights. They resulted in the burning of some 10,000 automobiles and caused injuries to at least 150 police officers, shocked the world and called much-

needed attention to the causes of the turmoil and its possible implications for the fight against terrorism.

The purpose of this brief report is to provide a broad overview of the conditions and policies in France that contributed to the riots, and to invite the reader to consider whether one or several such factors are also at work in the United States. We begin the discussion with a short review of the origins and development of Community Policing (*police de proximité*) in France.

I. French Concepts in Community Policing

During the late 1970s and early 1980s, France underwent a number of wrenching social changes, and saw an increase in violence and property crimes, together with local, politically-inspired acts of terrorism. The French national government, sensing that a hard-nosed and repressive police force was making matters worse, published the Peyrefitte Report that called for a social answer to the crime problem. As a result, the government appointed a committee to study the following factors:

- The psychological aspects of violence;
- The effects of improved urban planning on human behavior,
- Linkages between economic opportunity and violence; and
- Other social problems contributing to crime rates.

The Peyrefitte Committee was somewhat similar to the Swedish National Crime Prevention Council. In its report, the Committee criticized the traditional structure of French “top-down” bureaucracy, which had become secretive and unresponsive to public needs and demands. Instead, the recommendation was to hand more power to communities to determine their own security programs, and to involve key neighborhood persons and organizations in coming up with workable solutions.

Then, in August 2002, the French Parliament enacted the *Loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la sécurité intérieure (Homeland Security*

Planning and Programs Act). This law created bodies named the *Local Security and Crime Councils*, which placed France structurally in a position similar to that of Sweden. The new Act also completed the integration of social crime prevention with security (crime suppression) techniques and updated electronic technology, leaving the important decision-making powers with the local communities.

It should be noted that, while all those councils and partnerships were developing, France also spread the practice of *officiers de réseau*, or local beat officers, who received some special training in community policing skills. Originally started as a pilot program in a handful of northern French cities, this practice spread throughout the country and developed a number of innovative outreach techniques that proved very effective in reducing crime while improving community feelings of safety and participation in an interactive program.

When the Law of August 2002 went into effect, the combined local neighborhood policing concept was incorporated into the overall planning as *Police de Proximité*, or Community Policing. The intention is to mandate police cooperation with local communities, and to make police accountable to the public for its actions. Second, it mobilizes local residents to participate in ensuring their own security by using interagency outreach teams, problem-solving, counseling, and neighborhood volunteer work among other community policing approaches.

La Cour des Comptes:

In 2003, the French equivalent of the U.S. Government Accounting Office, which also acts as an Inspector General in many important capacities, published a large, detailed and comprehensive study on Immigration and Integration of foreign populations in France. Scholars from all walks of life participated in this enormous research aimed at generating recommendations and solutions for the problems of growing ghettos, exclusion, violence, scholastic failure, poverty, drugs, crime, and radical Islamist recruiting in the French immigrant, primarily Muslim, communities.

The *Cour des Comptes* study presented much new data and many suggestions for solving the problems of growing exclusion and restiveness in

those communities of immigrants from North Africa, Equatorial Africa, the Middle East and Southeast Asia. The study –and many of its component or contributing authors—named Community Policing as one of the most important elements in building a delivery system for what are essentially human rights solutions.

The Study found little resonance with the general public, however, perhaps because of its length and intricacy, but in major part because the national government, under a conservative administration, disagreed vehemently with nearly all of the conclusions in the Study. Instead, the President and the Interior Minister (Homeland Security Secretary) adopted a “get tough” policy consisting of a few simple slogans coupled with anti-Muslim rhetoric. The architecture of the Study was eclipsed by the immediate expediency of party politics.

Community Policing was beginning to falter even before the *Cour des Comptes* studies were completed, first because it was never very popular in the upper echelons of central government. France, distinguished from most other European democracies, is centralized. It is more difficult there than elsewhere to establish effective policing practices and to control them at local level than is the case in a federal governmental system.

There remains a deep gulf between the police and the citizens in France, despite all efforts to date. Police tend to adopt new policies without even notifying the public, much less inviting them in to discuss the pros and cons of the policy. Police attendance at community meetings generally takes the form of announcing steps being taken, explaining how the police will enforce certain laws or ordinances, and taking note of complaints. Public involvement is minimal and is limited to receiving information. The members of the community usually have no control or oversight in that process.

Although the French government commissioned a series of well researched, well written studies, discussed above, on how to integrate Muslim ethnic and linguistic communities into French society, the recommendations made by the researchers were never turned into effective legislation or policing methods. As a result, whole neighborhoods turned into “no go” zones for police, controlled by immigrant youth gangs. There is a total lack of police-community dialogue in those quarters. Needless to add, the atmosphere of

neglect, hopelessness and exclusion has resulted in the growth of local terrorist support cells.¹

Housed mainly in high-rise public housing projects located in suburbs of large French cities, immigrants and their families, even including the second and third generation of immigrants, are concentrated in neighborhoods made up of their own linguistic and ethnic composition where they come into little or no direct contact with ethnic and linguistic French.²

The children of yesterday's immigrants and their own descendants have little chance of a decent life while they remain excluded from French society. Instead, they are blamed by the government for the riots and unrest of October and November 2005, and are being prosecuted and imprisoned rapidly while the government is calling for new, tough restrictions on immigration, entry visas, refugee status, and new emergency laws.³

The Muslim immigrants are “ghettoized” in about 700 *zones urbaines sensibles* (government terminology for ‘urban problem neighborhoods’) housing a total of over five million people. A recent government report indicates that unemployment and drop-out rates in those ghettos are double the national average: also, taxable income is 40% lower, there are half the number of medical facilities, and crime is 50% higher than in the rest of the country.⁴

II. The French (dis)Connection:

Long before the 2005 riots, in February 2003, Interior Minister Nicholas Sarkozy began dismantling Community Policing in France, such as it was. Before the curtailment, Community Policing was both popular and effective. During the years 2000 through 2002, it was responsible for reducing crime rates throughout the country by an average of 17% per year for crimes of violence, and several percentage points over that rate for property crimes. Studies showed that the number of separate “interventions” with youth, especially immigrant young people, correlated closely with the declining rates of criminal activities. During that same period, crime closure rates increased by over 50%.⁵

Neighborhood police outreach teams, multilingual and skilled in interagency cooperation, fanned out regularly in the *banlieues* (ghettoes) to coordinate public safety issues with social programs such as education, nutrition, financial aid, alternative housing, employment, drug and alcohol rehab, mental health services, and many other related topics. Each interagency team had at least one GPS locator unit, and the police officers assigned to each team carried another GPS unit for backup. Each precinct operated its own server. This permitted a seamless linkup network that included patrol cars.⁶

In fact, French Community Policing was well on its way to becoming a solid international model for anti-terrorism and homeland defense when it was suddenly hit by right-wing politics in the Elysée Palace (Executive Branch of government). The national 2002-2003 budget called for an increase of 14,000 new police officers to be deployed nationwide, 6,500 of whom were destined to serve as community police. The new ultra-conservative cabinet ministers cancelled it and spent the money elsewhere.⁷

Further, all police outreach teams in the *banlieues* were dismantled. Police officers began operating in response teams out of regional barracks, visiting the ghettoes in armored cars, making arrests and then leaving again. Almost overnight, the policing philosophy went from friendly to militaristic. Even in ethnic French, middle-class neighborhoods throughout the country, the number of community police officers has dropped by 70% in the past two years.⁸

A few days before the November riots, Interior Minister Sarkozy revealed his plans to take a “power hose” (large-diameter fire hose) to the ghettoes to “clean out the scum” and lower their crime rate. He slurred Community Policing by calling it “a waste of time, playing soccer with young thugs”.

In August and September 2005, we wrote a series of comparative Community Policing studies for publication by the Government of Bulgaria in which we stated (two months before the French riots):

“A consequence of this missing element of *community participation* is that, over time, the social dimension loses its substance and its contents. Instead, police and civil service administrators tend to impose more repressive policies ‘from the top down’. Thus the exclusion and frustration of Muslim youth, among other groups, continues and increases.”⁹

But we were by no means the only observers to raise the warning of difficult times to come as the result of the French “Disconnection” of Community Policing. Former Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement continues:

“Community Policing carries out the traditional ‘beat officer’ functions on a daily basis, but it also does something much greater: It acts in concert with other providers of safety and security: high school principals, subsidized housing administrators, businesses, local community leaders, social workers, medical and mental health service providers, and many others. This form of policing was inspired by early innovations in Québec and in The Netherlands. The programs and their results were subjected in France to rigorous testing and evaluations between 1998 and 2001, but it was generally recognized that they would need more time to succeed, to reach maturity.

“Sadly, Community Policing was surreptitiously –and really quickly, I might add, starting on January 1, 2003—cancelled and emptied of its budget and of its basic substance by (new Minister) Nicolas Sarkozy.”

“It is time to give back to the Community Police their funding and their substance, that is, their effective tools, especially in the “no go” areas and in the giant ghettos surrounding our cities. But this presupposes a concept of democratic humanism on the part of the police themselves.”¹⁰

A recent Europe-wide study, carried out by the Swedish *Riksdag* (Parliament) and sponsored by the Council of Ministers of the European Union, concluded that, of all presently known strategies for combating radicalization and recruitment to terrorism in Europe, Community Policing is by far the most effective:

“We need to spot such behaviour by, first and foremost, community policing, which should also supervise efforts at Internet monitoring and travel to conflict zones by recruitment target groups.”¹¹

European countries, with the possible exception of Great Britain, deplore the French disconnection of Community Policing, not least because of the growing mountain of evidence of its effectiveness in combating terrorism by prevention and by arrests and public prosecutions of terrorists and their confederates.

III. American Parallels:

The Bush administration has cut more than \$ 2.3 billion out of law enforcement budgets since September 11, 2001. The COPS (Community Oriented Policing Service) grant funding was reduced from \$ 500 million per year to just under \$18 million, or a drop of over 95%. Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) have been completely eliminated, a loss of \$416 million/year, and the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP) has also been put out of existence, from a previous budget of \$400 million/year.

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the best programs are precisely those targeted for elimination.

The Byrne Grant Program, that funded drug task forces at local level, suffered a 42% reduction in 2005-06, and is scheduled for elimination in the new budget. Cuts to that program already led to a nearly 58% reduction in arrest rates for drug dealing and manufacturing nationwide last year.

Thus, America is, without explanation, disposing of its own most valuable tool in combating terrorism at home: Local community policing, especially in its most recent “best practice” forms.

A thorough recent study commissioned by the Jamestown Foundation¹² analyzed and discussed present international terror organizations from the aspects of

- a. organizational structure;
- b. funding;
- c. procurement;
- d. manpower and logistics;
- e. training and personnel services; and
- f. propaganda.

The authors concluded that the modern, devolved systems used by terrorist organizations have divided rather uniformly between “Above the radar” and “Beneath the radar” processes. Roughly, terrorist operations are carried out either by means of high technology or of low technology.

The evidence is persuasive that terrorism has assigned only one of the foregoing functions to the high technology, or ‘above the radar’ category: That of propaganda. All the others use low-tech means, primarily the traditional spies’ tools of short-distance travel, surreptitious meetings, silence or rapidly-whispered dialects for conversations, background or ‘white’ noise to frustrate electronic surveillance, message or materials drops, ‘mules’ for deliveries, physical transfer of inconspicuous amounts of money on a traditional, long Islamic chain of set-offs and unwritten accounts.

None of these are fit subjects for wiretapping or for electronic surveillance. Telephones have been largely avoided by terrorist groups since December 2001. The present US preoccupation with NSA domestic communications surveillance is puzzling to most experts, who see no purpose behind them, unless that purpose is the surreptitious surveillance of millions of Americans for other reasons, locating terrorists being merely a public pretext.

Thus, it is evident that the US Government is provoking a constitutional crisis over its war powers, only for the sake of ensuring its daily dose of high-tech propaganda and disinformation.

European countries, using community policing in its *transparent partnership* sense, are gathering the requisite HUMINT in sufficient quantities to conduct successful public trials of suspected terrorists by the hundreds.

Moreover, European governments are not oblivious to the high-tech/low-tech divide in terrorist operational flow structures as discussed *supra*. In view of the debates now raging in France, that country will most likely reinstate its community policing budgets and programs through public discourse. The role of community policing, and the anti-terrorism strategy of using the HUMINT emanating from the most proximate receiver, i.e., local specially trained police, has proven itself and its value.

After five years of purely militaristic strategies, it is time to listen to the evidence and stop destroying Community Policing for political reasons.

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