Policing Uncertainty: Countering Terror through Community Intelligence and Democratic Policing

By
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This article explores how counterterrorism policing strategies and practices in the United Kingdom have changed in the face of recent terrorist attacks. It considers the evident limitations of these developments and how a local, democratic style of neighborhood policing could be used to manufacture the community intelligence "feed" that offers the best probability of preventing and deterring future forms of such violence. These substantive concerns are set against a theoretical backdrop attending to how policing can respond to risks where the contours of the threat are uncertain. The analysis is informed by interviews with U.K. police officers involved in intelligence and counterterrorism work conducted during the early part of 2005.

Keywords: counterterrorism; democratic policing; neighborhood policing; signal crimes; community intelligence; uncertainty

Terrorist violence is a form of communicative action. Designed to impact upon public perceptions by inducing fear in pursuit of some political objective, violence is dramaturgically enacted as a solution to a sociopolitical power imbalance (Karstedt 2003). It is thus ultimately an attempt at social control, where a less powerful actor seeks to exert influence over the norms, values, and/or conduct of another more powerful grouping (Black 2004).

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Terrorists can seek to act upon political processes and public perceptions in two subtly different modes. The first is where violence is directed toward a symbol of the social and cultural order to which the perpetrator is opposed. In these *symbolic crimes*, exemplified by the 9/11 attack on the Pentagon as a building that is both a connotative and denotative signifier of U.S. military power, the salience of the act is derived from the drama of violence performed against an iconic representation of some facet of a cultural or social order. The second mode is where the impact of the incident is contingent to a greater degree upon the logic illuminated by the *signal crime* concept (Innes 2004). Terrorist attacks that signal risk and threat tend to be located in routine public settings where mass civilian casualties are likely to occur. They exert political and perceptual influence by signaling the risks and threats that can be manufactured in everyday life situations by a determined minority and in so doing, induce changes in how citizens think, feel, or act in relation to their security. Recent examples of where this signaling logic has been enacted through terrorist attacks are the Bali nightclub bombings and the bombings on the public transport systems in Madrid and London. Some instances of terrorist violence, such as the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, embody both a symbolic and a signaling logic. For the most part though, the accent tends toward one or the other of these two communicative modes.

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Differentiating between the symbolic and signal modes by which terrorist violence acts upon political processes and public perceptions provides insight into the subtly different ways that locally situated terrorisms can impact upon a democratic social order (Laqueur 2001). But for both modes, the potency and power of violence depends upon inducing a sense of uncertainty about security in the public mind and political process. Terrorism seeks to manufacture uncertainty to induce a reaction that destabilizes a social order to render it more precarious in some manner. That it sometimes achieves this is perhaps evidenced by the aftermath of the Madrid train bombings where commentators have suggested that the al-Qaeda–sponsored attack altered the outcome of the subsequent democratic elections.[1]

It has long been the case that democratic institutional orders and the civil society institutions to which they relate have demonstrated a reasonably high degree of resilience to terrorism, and broadly this remains so. Nevertheless, there is growing concern about the extent to which terrorist violence can impact negatively upon democratic order and the routines of civil society (Blair 2005). As terrorism induced uncertainty intermingles with and amplifies a wider "ambient insecurity" emanating from more everyday experiences of crime and disorder under conditions of late modernity, a veneer of security becomes increasingly difficult to preserve (Garland 2001; Innes 2004). Terrorism not only impacts directly upon political processes, as in Spain, but can also amplify social divisions based upon ethnicity and faith, keying into wider concerns about community cohesion. This is why the conceptual accent in this article is upon *counterterrorism* rather than *counterterrorist* work. The latter term restricts the issues to dealing with the protagonists, whereas the former captures how the response to terrorism in democratic states increasingly encompasses managing a range of potential harms.

With these issues as a backdrop, this article provides a case study of the United Kingdom police response to the changing contours of threat posed by al-Qaeda's jihadist terrorism. Of particular consequence to the analysis is the identification within the U.K. counterterrorism response of a second type of uncertainty to that outlined above. In the wake of the 7/7 bombings on London's transport networks, there is a real concern across the police and security sector about their capacity to calibrate the contours of the threat al-Qaeda poses. This connects to concerns about whether established methodologies for generating intelligence on possible terrorist organizations, of the type used in Ireland for example, are suitable to deal with the new risks posed by a morphing, fluid, and decentered al-Qaeda.[2]

I will propose that one possible solution to this uncertainty is to better integrate a system of local neighborhood policing (NP) into the counterterrorism apparatus. Based upon providing local communities with a degree of direct democratic influence over how they are policed, NP officers will be well positioned to build levels of interpersonal trust with members of Muslim and other minority communities upon which the communication of intelligence is often contingent. As such, NP processes, in addition to their everyday functions of policing volume crime and disorder, can be used for detecting the subtle indicators of suspicion that people may develop about activities connected to terrorism in their communities. To advocate better integrating NP into the counterterrorism effort is not to suggest that such maneuvers will be unproblematic. Rather more pragmatically, such moves may be more effective and ultimately less damaging to democratic traditions than extending covert policing methods and the sorts of reactionary legislative reform proposals that governments tend to issue in the wake of major terrorist incidents.

The article commences by outlining the key dimensions of counterterrorism work and how several factors have collectively encouraged Western policing agencies to reconfigure the ways in which they seek to understand and respond to the threats posed by al-Qaeda. Developing this analysis, there follows an empirically grounded exploration of some innovative police approaches that relate to counterterrorism activity. The focus then shifts to consider the limitations

of the emergent police approach and how these may be overcome by adopting a highly localized form of democratic policing. Throughout, this article is set against a wider analytic theme of uncertainty. For while scholars have written much on how risk assessment and risk management practices are animating reform in the conduct of social control (Ericson and Haggerty 1997; Simon 1993), they have paid little attention to how social control is enacted in conditions of uncertainty resulting from incomplete or low information. Thus in focusing upon the contemporary configuration of counterterrorism policing in the United Kingdom, the discussion attends to the question of how social control agencies manage risks where the contours of the threat are opaque and uncertain.

Data and Method

The empirical data informing this article were collected between January and March 2005 as part of a research project examining the effectiveness of the U.K. police in collecting and handling "community intelligence" from minority groups[3] and young people in respect of several different issues including terrorism. Interviews were conducted with police officers from three police force areas purposively sampled to enable comparative analysis of how different organizations were dealing with similar intelligence issues. The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) in London was selected because it is the largest police organization in the United Kingdom and has a national responsibility for counterterrorism. The second force located in the north of England was representative of the circumstances of many midsized U.K. police forces and had recent experience of dealing with significant public disorder between ethnic communities. The third police force area in the south of England was chosen to explore the issues being confronted by small forces in managing community intelligence.[4]

A total of twenty-six semistructured interviews were conducted with police officers and staff working with intelligence on counterterrorism issues at central and local levels.[5] This included the force intelligence directors responsible for managing the intelligence systems in northern and southern forces and officers with national responsibilities in the MPS. Officers who either were working with Special Branch or had done so recently were part of the sample in the three forces.[6] Of particular interest though for the concerns of this article was the inclusion of specialist officers from two units in the Metropolitan Police—the Muslim Contact Unit and the Strategic Contact Unit.[7] The officers in these recently established units focused upon working with particular community groups to manage their concerns. In addition, the head of the National Community Tension Team (NCTT) was interviewed. NCTT is a central policing unit working with all forces to monitor intercommunity and intracommunity tensions nationwide. As such, it has a key role in managing postincident responses to any major threats to public order, including terrorist incidents at home and overseas. Six interviews were also conducted with members of the public who had previously

provided intelligence to police on activities of concern, capturing an often over-looked dimension in discussions of police intelligence.

The Social Organization of Counterterrorism

Counterterrorism work has prospective and retrospective aspects. The prospective "precrime" aspects are performed on an ongoing basis and are designed to prevent, deter, and disrupt the activities of those thought to be involved in activities related to terrorism.[8] Involving surveillance of and interventions against people directly involved in groups supporting terrorist action, it also increasingly encompasses measures taken against the support infrastructures for such groups, particularly targeting their financial resources (McCulloch and Pickering 2005; Levi and Gilmore 2002). This is part of what Thacher (2005) dubbed "the offender search" strategy of counterterrorism.

The second dimension to counterterrorism work is more reactive "postcrime" activities and centers upon postincident response. This includes criminal investigations to identify the perpetrators of any attack and to locate any support infrastructure that can be targeted as part of future prevention and deterrence efforts. More recently, though, and particularly following the September 11, 2001, attacks, increasing interest has been directed to managing any wider impacts upon communities. As the attacks performed by al-Qaeda in Western countries have deliberately sought to exploit innate tensions in what Karstedt (2006 [this volume]) terms the "liberal inclusionary project" of democracy, by using terrorist violence to create a fissure along the lines of religion. Police and security agencies have increasingly recognized a need to mitigate any perceptual harm that may result from terrorism in terms of exacerbating and enflaming interethnic and interfaith community tension. In the following quotation from a senior police officer, the ways in which these different aspects of counterterrorism coalesce are articulated:

> If something were to happen in the terrorist threat. . . . There would be a need for increased vigilance, . . . a need for increased policing all sorts of options around unconventional ways of doing police work like the overt deployment of firearms and so on, which might cause fear. Our role would be to run the community side of that, making sure that we were into particular communities which might be targeted for backlash or whatever . . . and that's precisely what we did for post September 11th. (11)

In the second part of this quotation, the officer briefly touches upon some of the contingent and complex impacts of policing terrorist threats and how police responses can amplify levels of insecurity in vulnerable communities. An undercurrent in the interviews is that terrorist incidents can function as triggers for wider crime and public order problems that have to be dealt with by police.[9] Consequently, postincident response strategies in the United Kingdom now routinely involve deploying police officers to undertake high visibility "reassurance" patrols at strategic locations, mass media campaigns, and so forth as part of what Thacher (2005) labeled the "community protection" domain of counterterrorism.

TABLE 1
FOUR STRANDS OF COUNTERTERRORISM ACTIVITY

	Offender Search	Community Protection
Prospective	Identifying and surveillance of the activities of "high-risk" groups and their members; disrupting activities of potential threat groups; investigating and prosecuting acts preparatory to terrorism	Target hardening and creating a "harsh environment" for the conduct of terrorism; public resilience and preparedness
Retrospective	Investigating, arresting, and prosecuting suspects allegedly involved in committing an attack.	Monitoring community tensions; public reassurance through "perceptual interventions."

Drawing these themes together produces four key strands of counterterrorism activity, as shown in Table 1.

Conceptualizing counterterrorism in this fashion enables one to map the division of labor in terms of how key agencies perform specific roles as part of the overall counterterrorism effort. In the United Kingdom, domestic counterterrorism activity has traditionally focused upon the Security Service (MI5), Special Branch police officers located in each of the fifty-six police forces and the Anti-Terrorist Branch of the MPS. Typically, the Security Service gathers clandestine and open source intelligence information, conducts threat assessments and intervenes to prevent and deter such terrorist threats as are located, and shares information with other agencies. The police, largely through their Special Branch officers and the Anti-Terrorist Branch, are responsible for pursuing counterterrorism investigations by collecting evidence for introduction into any legal proceedings (Masse 2003). While "firewalls" between these organizations inhibit exchanges of intelligence data, several interviewees confirmed that in recent years the working relationships between the Security Service and a number of specialist police units had become closer, not just as a result of counterterrorism issues, but also because of efforts to tackle organized and transnational crime (Innes and Sheptycki 2004). Overall, though, domestic policing agencies have been more involved in community protection functions.

As intimated previously, a particular concern for retrospective community protection work is trying to prevent the possibility of a terrorist incident functioning as a "flashpoint" for wider public disorder. This encompasses domestic incidents but also trying to understand the local impact of geopolitical events:

> When the original invasion of Afghanistan was going on, we were holding weekly meetings with community leaders within [town name] to see what the impact was of what was going

on elsewhere . . . recognising the political implications of what was going on. . . . Because obviously a lot of people are from the area of Pakistan which borders Afghanistan and there's going to be family ties and there's going to be concerns . . . and whether they had any concerns within their own communities or indeed, because [town name], the one thing about Muslim communities, they interact with each other, Muslim communities around the country and you may not have a problem in [town name] but there are family members living in Slough. (23)

The concern on this occasion was that the military actions being undertaken in Afghanistan would trigger problems in the United Kingdom. As this quotation illuminates, current concerns with national security are more complex than simply preventing and deterring terrorist attacks. Countering terrorism also encompasses trying to predict and manage how incidents overseas may function as signal events to communities residing in Western countries increasing domestic community tensions.

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Counterterrorist work performed by both high and low policing agencies encompasses several interconnected strands, ranging from attempts at preventing and disrupting potential assailants to minimizing the repercussions and harm should such efforts be unsuccessful.[10] There is, though, set against the backdrop of the September 11 attacks and the bombings in London and Madrid, an increasingly widely articulated suggestion that given the new risks and threats faced, the role of local policing in counterterrorism activity needs to be enhanced (cf. Kelling 2004, 3).

In sum, the reasons this view has been strongly espoused are threefold:

- uncertainty about the contours of the threat, in terms of the individuals willing to perform terrorist violence and the locations where they and their support groups are to be found;
- appreciation of the need to manage public fears through reassurance oriented perceptual interventions to mitigate the overall social, economic, and political harms of terrorism; and
- concern that terrorist incidents can enflame community tensions, causing other crimes, increasing public disorder, and producing longer term detrimental impacts upon the cohesion of particular communities.

Community Intelligence

A significant intelligence deficit in terms of defining and understanding the threat posed by affiliates of al-Qaeda residing in Western countries is a motive for enhancing the role of police agencies, particularly around the prospective offender search functions of counterterrorism. This is exemplified by the recent bombings in London on 7/7, where intelligence was undeveloped on the individuals involved. Moreover, they came from Leeds, a city in the north of England not renowned for radicalism or community tension. In several other cases currently going through the English courts, individuals from very different parts of the country are subject to prosecution for acts preparatory to terrorism. Collectively these cases suggest a worrying picture for the authorities and public. It is widely recognized that traditional intelligence methods have achieved only limited penetration of many Muslim communities, and yet these cases involve individuals and areas that one might not expect or predict to be involved in terrorist activities. This raises questions about whether the architecture of the extant intelligence system is suited for responding to the emerging situation.

All agencies across the policing and security sector make use of intelligence, although they define, understand, and use it in a variety of ways according to their organizational imperatives and concerns. Due to its widespread abuse, the concept of intelligence has frequently acquired pejorative connotations, associated in the public mind with clandestine and secretive political policing activities (Innes and Sheptycki 2004). Nevertheless, collecting and using intelligence does seem to be part of the "dirty work" of democracy. It is enmeshed in how democratic institutions employ increasingly specialized and technical covert modes of social control to preserve an appearance of social order (Marx 1988) and for countering the threats posed by groups such as al-Qaeda that seek to subvert democratic processes. Stripped of any normative associations and imputations though, intelligence is simply a mode of information. For organizations, it is information that has been processed to provide foresight—a predictive capacity about how to act at some point in the future to achieve particular objectives given certain conditions.

Treverton (2005) contended that, compared to policing agencies, intelligence used by national security agencies tends to be relatively undefined. He attributed this to the fact that security agencies are typically working to build a generalized picture of risks and threats, whereas police are focused upon constructing individual legal cases. According to Wark (2005), during the 1990s the orientation of national security agencies shifted, due largely to an "open source intelligence revolution." Driven by significant developments in information and communication technologies, most notably the Internet, national security agencies invested in and focused upon "signals intelligence" (Sigint) processing technologies to better locate open source intelligence at the expense of conducting more basic and fundamental "human intelligence" (Humint) work (Eddy 2005).

Police too during the 1990s altered the configuration of their intelligence usage. Under the auspices of intelligence-led policing, police agencies were encouraged to improve their efficiency and effectiveness by proactively identifying

problems and targeting the individuals and crimes responsible for causing most harm. This was particularly pronounced in the United Kingdom, where the National Intelligence Model (NIM) was introduced to provide a national framework for how police agencies acquire and process intelligence data (National Criminal Intelligence Service 2000). Based upon differentiating between three levels of intelligence (local/regional/national and international), in principle if not always in practice, the NIM was intended to connect information flows and exchange between "high" and "low" policing agencies (John and Maguire 2004).

The implementation of the NIM processes is an explicit manifestation of a broader trend that Ericson and Shearing (1986) dubbed "the scientification" of police work and Manning (2003) its "rationalization." As Maguire (2000) noted, the rationalization of the intelligence function induces a shift toward a more proactive mode of working based upon the principles of risk management. However, a number of criticisms can be made of NIM, its use of intelligence, and the biases it introduces into police practice (Sheptycki 2004), three of which are especially pertinent to this article.

In his study of police intelligence, Gill (2000) noted a systemic bias resulting from how the provenance of intelligence is established that induces a focusing of efforts upon particular recurring individuals and problems. In part this stems from the problems experienced in managing the volumes of intelligence data produced but also from difficulties associated with searching across existing data to locate new and emerging risks (Innes, Fielding, and Cope 2005). The implication is that while current intelligence systems and processes are likely to be fairly effective in identifying threats that are connected to people or places where intelligence is previously available, they may be less effective in locating new or emerging threats—a problem directly relevant to current counterterrorism concerns in the United Kingdom.

Interrelated with the above is a more general feeling that while the NIM has improved police handling of crime intelligence, it has induced an overreliance upon information resulting from "professional" police informants at the expense of other kinds of community intelligence (Innes 1999). Community intelligence is different in a number of ways when compared with more traditional kinds of crime and criminal intelligence (Innes, Fielding, and Cope 2005). It tends to be open-source, rather than acquired from covert human sources, and is often provided by ordinary members of the public, rather than those who have some connection to criminal activity—the quality that, according to the dictates of police culture, provides criminal or crime intelligence with unique purchase (Innes 1999). Whereas criminal intelligence tends to target particular individuals, and crime intelligence particular incident types, community intelligence covers a range of issues, frequently being used by police to build a picture of the contextual risks that a particular community group feels concerned about. Community intelligence applied to counterterrorism is precisely the type of data that might help police to circumvent the intelligence gaps and blind spots that seemingly inhere in their established methods.

One important application of community intelligence to counterterrorism policing, as several police interviewees candidly admitted, was to facilitate a better

understanding of the makeup of different communities—in terms of the social networks to which individuals and groups belong and the intracommunity tensions that may exist between them. As one of the police officers interviewed, himself a practicing Muslim, described it,

> There is no such thing as THE Muslim community. There is a hugely complex set of people making up different sub-sections of a community who have different divisions, rivalries and factions. (04)

Subtle intricacies and nuances of this sort are not the kind of things that police have been especially well tuned to in the past but are of significant consequence in prospectively and retrospectively countering terrorist threats both domestically and internationally.

This sense that the policing environment had become more complex was apparent also in the comments of members of different Muslim communities spoken to in the course of the research. For example, one man said,

> The problem is that there's a huge range of different communities within a community . . . just because everybody's brown in that area doesn't make them part of that same community. . . . There are now three Mosques in [town name] and those three Mosques obviously mean that the groups that go to each of those Mosques follow something slightly different. So you've effectively got three community groups within the culture of Muslims immediately in one particular area. I mean clearly if I think back to [town name] 20 years ago I would have been able to walk down the street and I would know everybody that was there . . . however. If I look at it now, if I walk from one end of my street right to the other, I may bump into, you know, 15 or 20 people from my community, in inverted commas, and yet I might not know a single one of them. (25)

Two important implications for counterterrorism policing can be disaggregated from such social trajectories. First, as peoples' conceptions of belonging become more tightly defined (R. Williams 2000), and they no longer feel that who they are is sufficiently represented by broader classifications of identity, the potential for intergroup tensions is increased. The more groups there are, the greater the potential for their norms or values to come into conflict with those of other groups. Community intelligence is one way in which police can obtain some understanding of any tensions that might be exacerbated following a terrorist incident. Second, as more social groups represent increasingly distinctive social identities, so there are more groups who can be potential victims and/or perpetrators. Consequently, as the number of identity groups increases, so the number of contacts that the police maintain needs to be increased in an effort to monitor the activities of any people who might be a risk or at risk. But of course, the police have a finite amount of resources to undertake such work, and cultivating and developing effective human intelligence sources is notoriously difficult (Dunnighan and Norris 1999). Thus, building a network of community intelligence contacts provides a comparatively effective way of maintaining surveillance over groups and communities that are especially hard for the police to penetrate either overtly or covertly.

At least in part, then, calls to increase the role of community intelligence in U.K. counterterrorism reflect worries that aspects of the current intelligence systems, developed particularly through years of dealing with the situation in Ireland, may not be as effective in dealing with al-Qaeda.[11] The reasons for this can be traced back to differing organization and methods. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) and other Irish groups were based upon fairly traditional hierarchical organizational structures. Consequently, if a human intelligence source could penetrate the organization at a particular level, or an existing member persuaded to inform on colleagues, then intelligence on a range of other members and their activities could be collected fairly readily. This mode of social organization does not apply to the current arrangements of al-Qaeda, however, which is based upon largely autonomous, disparate cells and groups that are not connected by any formal command and control structures. This means that successful penetration of one cell or group may not yield much intelligence on others. Furthermore, in terms of methods, IRA cells often provided warnings about imminent attacks, whereas al-Qaeda operatives have not done so and indeed do not expect to be alive after launching their attack. It is this shift in the methodology of violence alongside changes in organizational structure and the difficulty of establishing knowledge about them that has served to induce such a sense of uncertainty among those charged with countering terrorist threats. And while a reduction in this uncertainty may occur over time as the relevant agencies become more accustomed to the nature of the threat, the diagnosis presented herein suggests that a reconfiguring the intelligence architecture would increase this likelihood.

Strategic Engagement as Soft Power

Reflecting these problems with intelligence and the increasing complexities surrounding notions of collective identity, some units within the U.K. police service have sought to respond to such issues creatively. Specialist community engagement units have been established by police to develop and manage relationships with what are termed "strategic contacts." Strategic contacts community leaders and opinion formers from groups perceived as strategically important in understanding the policing environment. From the police point of view, the purpose of such contacts is twofold. Primarily it is anticipated that they can be used to develop a "community intelligence feed" about the activities of individuals and groups in these communities of interest to the police (this intelligence is not restricted to terrorism but rather covers all aspects of policing). Additionally, police specialists recognize that such relationships also provide a communication channel into these communities to counteract rumors or other information. The nature of this second function was described by the head of the MPS Strategic Contact Unit:

> What we try to do is to link with strategic partners within those faith communities and try to keep them in the loop so to speak, in respect of telling them what is actually happening as far as we know, rather than any rumours. (03)

Strategic engagement with various vulnerable communities by the police as part of their counterterrorism work is a direct response to the range of problems and issues outlined previously. Unlike more traditional forms of police intelligence work, strategic contacts are undertaken overtly. Officers engaged in developing them do not mask their police status from the people with whom they are interacting. As such, success depends upon officers' ability to build interpersonal trust between themselves and particular key individuals. For the community representatives, these strategic contacts offer a chance to bring their concerns to the police and to hopefully influence the style of policing received by what are, after all, often comparatively vulnerable communities.

In all of the three police force areas studied, building strategic contacts was performed by a small number of officers. That this work is largely restricted in this way says something about how it is perceived within the environs of the police organization. But to a degree, it also reflects more pragmatic considerations. On aggregate, citizens are increasingly disinclined to trust institutions (LaFree 1998), but they may trust particular individual representatives of those institutions. Consequently, propagating personal relationships between individual police officers and community representatives is potentially a comparatively effective way of building trust with groups who are often antipathetical to police.

The processes used to generate strategic community intelligence are based upon different principles than those typically used in the manufacture of criminal intelligence which is structured by ideas of covertness and the "need to know" principle (Sheptycki 2004). Human criminal intelligence sources are seen as resources of the police organization as a whole to be managed via an intelligence system rather than being dependent upon any personal relationship with an individual police handler. Indeed, processes of criminal intelligence are now systematized in such a way as to explicitly discourage personal relations being formed between handlers and sources (Innes 1999). This contrasts with how strategic community intelligence contacts are developing, where they are overtly conducted and personal relationships constitute the working capital of how trust is built for community intelligence to be passed to the police. One way to understand this emergent approach is as the importation of some of the principles of community policing into the national security arena. The police are effectively seeking to achieve their objectives by operationalizing a form of "soft power."[12]

The concept of soft power was coined by Joseph Nye (2004) to describe processes of geopolitical influence that shape the world system and relations between nation states therein. For Nye, "hard power" derives from coercive interventions where the capacity to invoke physical force underpins the action performed. In contrast, soft power works through processes of persuasion, negotiation, and agenda-setting, providing a far more subtle mode of influence. This notion of soft power seems to be analogous to how police in the United Kingdom are seeking to use their strategic engagement contacts.

In the following account, a member of the MPS Strategic Contact Unit describes an occasion where the unit used soft power by drawing upon intelligence about

escalating community tensions to try to persuade particular groups not to respond to the provocations of radical Islamist agitators:

> Last year as well there was some issues which we picked up from the Sikh and Hindu communities that they were unhappy with a particular Islamic group called [xxxx] and they'd actually put some stuff on a website which was deemed to be anti-religion. . . . But what was going to happen was that these communities were so incensed that they were going to mount a counter demonstration in Trafalgar Square against this particular group who were going to set up a stall there . . . we had a meeting, and we said these are what the issues are, this is the work we are doing in terms of intelligence on this particular group, we would appreciate it if you would actually go back to your communities and say the police are dealing with this effectively and any counter demonstration would cause more difficulties. And effectively we reduced the policing demand for that event. (01)

This exemplifies the negotiated and persuasive qualities of soft power. It starts also to give a sense of the subtleties and intricacies of the police work involved.

The Limitations of Strategic Engagement

Following the attacks in London in July 2005, police and national intelligence agencies publicly stated that there was no developed intelligence about the activities of the two terrorist cells. That this situation transpired is potentially suggestive of some of the weaknesses of the strategic engagement approach more broadly.

By identifying individual members of particular communities as leaders and/or opinion formers, police are seeking to establish contact with people who are most likely to be able to help them to accomplish their objectives. In so doing, however, it is of vital importance to be able to connect with the right people. Given some of the complex issues about collective identity and group formation discussed previously, it is difficult to know who really represents a community's views. Similarly, there must be a concern about whether community leaders are really in touch with those most at risk of alienation and radicalization.

The officers interviewed who were working to foster strategic contacts themselves voiced concerns about the limitations of this approach:

> So although we have this ongoing relationship this strategic attitude and these strategic contacts . . . what we miss out on is that sort of common view, i.e. from the common Muslim, the common gay person, the common black person. I don't think we necessarily get their voice coming through in strategic relations. And I think that needs to be sieved a bit. Whenever we go to people and say "What is the community's view?" I think we end up with a one track view. (02)

In part, such concerns are symptomatic of the ways in which this style of community engagement work has rapidly evolved in the context of modern policing organizations. But it also illuminates a more fundamental weakness that is directly analogous to Granovetter's (1982) conceptualization of the "strength of

weak ties." Police strategic engagements seek to instigate "strong ties" to key individuals located within particular communities. But what Granovetter's work demonstrates is that, especially in situations where information is diffusely located, an extensive social network of weak ties has greater utility than a more restricted network of strong ties. Applied to issues of counterterrorism, where the key pieces of intelligence may well be diffusely located among different community members, it would seem that police strategic engagements need to be supplemented with a far more extensive network of community contacts. This could be accomplished by greatly expanding the capacity of the "high" policing agencies and their established covert methods for developing intelligence sources or, alternatively, better integrating "low policing" agencies into the conduct of counterterrorism activities. In the United Kingdom, under the auspices of the Neighbourhood Policing (NP) program, a suitable vehicle for this is currently being rolled out in the form of a democratically oriented, highly localized policing system.

NP and Local Democracy

Under the U.K. government's current reform program, it is intended that by 2008 all neighborhoods in England and Wales will have their own dedicated policing teams. NP officers are to be assigned to specific neighborhoods and tasked to engage with individuals and groups therein to generate community intelligence on the key collective problems affecting local security. Once a profile of local problems is assembled, then all local people are given an opportunity to vote on their priorities for police action at specially convened police and community meetings of the sort popularized through the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (Skogan and Hartnett 1997). It then becomes the responsibility of the neighborhood officers to address these problems. In effect, this process amounts to constructing a knowledge base about the drivers of insecurity in the neighborhoods where officers are working and providing the opportunity for local people to democratically influence how they are policed.

The integration of rudimentary democratic mechanisms to provide for local community influence over policing is a marked departure in terms of the traditions of police governance in the United Kingdom. Unlike the County Sheriff system in the United States, in the United Kingdom the dictum of "constabulary independence" has meant that the conduct of policing has, at least nominally, been deliberately sequestered from any notion of direct political influence (Reiner 1992). Citizen governance of local policing has been restricted to membership of Police Authorities, although in practice they have been dominated by local councilors and magistrates rather than "ordinary" people. The Police Authorities are one component of a tripartite governance structure, with power shared between the local Chief Constable and Home Secretary. There is widespread recognition, though, that there is an accretion of power to the role of central government under this tripartite structure. Counterposed to this overarching trend, NP processes move mechanisms of accountability far closer to the public, providing greater ownership

and control in terms of how individual communities are policed. Indeed, one way of understanding such moves is as supplementing the representative democracy provided by police authorities, with a form of direct, proximate democratic influence practiced at neighborhood level police-community forums.

Any benefits in improving public trust and confidence resulting from such processes are likely to be particularly important where relations with police have been historically difficult, which would include many Muslim communities in the United Kingdom. Minority ethnic communities have consistently voiced concern that they are simultaneously and consistently overpoliced as suspects and underpoliced as victims, as a consequence of which trust and confidence has been low (Bowling 1999). But these same communities are now of most importance in terms of countering the domesticated jihadist threat. Because under NP processes, police are tasked to become more responsive to community defined problems, they are more likely to persuade community members of the benefits of assisting police and, unlike high policing agencies, can provide something explicit in return to vulnerable communities by managing their more routine security concerns.

The architecture of the NP system is designed to generate and collect community intelligence on a community's self-defined crime and disorder problems (Innes 2005). It is a process that can be harnessed to establish the presence of any suspicions about potential terrorist activities. The importance of developing this local network is that indicators of suspicion for terrorist activities are often subtle and may not be known to any one individual but rather shared between several individuals in a community. Individuals may have snippets of information that on their own provide only a mild suggestion of a risk but when brought together collectively provide a more substantial picture. It is this capacity to deal with a diffusion of information that a network of weak community ties developed through NP provides.

In his analysis of the U.S. federal system, Thacher (2005) suggested that integrating local policing agencies in homeland security efforts has negatively impacted upon the delivery of normal policing services. He maintains that as local agencies have become involved in surveillance of Muslim communities, so trust has been corroded. NP is similarly vulnerable, and the potential tensions between roles that local officers perform on an ongoing daily basis and the more exceptional tasks of countering terrorism need to be acknowledged. However, the fundamental problem remains that at the current time, state authorities do not have a textured and high-resolution understanding of the evolving terrorist threat. There is, therefore, a fundamental need to find a way to improve the intelligence feed. The particular strength of the NP approach is that it can perform such a function as part of working to address more routine neighborhood security concerns.

The significance of grounding such an intelligence network in a NP system, and why it may prove more effective over the longer term than simply expanding the number of Special Branch and Security Service officers engaged in this work, is that NP aims to build trust. By being responsive to community defined problems and because they are on long-term assignments in particular communities, NP officers are well placed to foster and develop the trust that is required for people to provide information to them. NP processes thereby offer a significant

complement to existing intelligence channels. The community intelligence accessed may not generate the hard leads of the sort provided by other more traditional covert methods. But it may overcome the problem of the diffusion of information by developing indicators of suspicion about individuals, groups, and locations that the police should examine more closely. What local policing potentially provides is an ongoing sensitization to the normal state of a community and thus may detect early signs that risks have increased in some manner.

Examining the current counterterrorism situation . . . illuminates traces of the more generalizable features of how policing responds and tries to reconfigure itself when it has only an opaque image of a problem to counter.

The trust negotiated by NP may only be thin, but having individual local officers delivering services tailored to address community defined problems means this can be sustained across a broad-based community network over the longer term, and it should thus be sufficient for maintaining the social relationships that underpin the provision of intelligence.[13] It is, however, important to outline the contingencies present in any such process. During the interviews with the strategic contact officers, they voiced their frustrations about how government policies and pronouncements made by senior politicians often rendered their work on the ground interacting with Muslim communities far more difficult. These political interventions often made individuals feel particularly vulnerable and under suspicion and, thus, disinclined to work with police. As a consequence, the strategic contact officers were continually negotiating a path of trying to build greater trust and stop what they had previously built from being undermined by events in the political realm. Similar processes are likely to create tensions in terms of the capacity of NP processes to generate community intelligence. But because NP is primarily focused upon addressing neighborhood security concerns, it should demonstrate greater resilience when confronted with such pressures.

Conclusion

Violent terrorist acts throughout Europe and beyond committed by supporters of the al-Qaeda ideology have signaled the risks to security that can be manufactured

by small groups acting in difficult to predict ways and, in so doing, have symbolized a profound opposition to the values of liberal-democratic order. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States, probing questions were raised about the extant intelligence apparatus and the suitability of its structures and practices for countering the new threats posed by al-Qaeda (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2003). Similar debates have been taking place in Europe, where, in the aftermath of attacks in London, Madrid, and elsewhere, police and security services are concerned about whether they have sufficient intelligence and the right systems to detect and prevent any future threats. Driven by the fact that al-Qaeda has evolved in a way that has made it hard to define its essence and capacity, uncertainty abounds as to what the precise threat being faced is and how it may be properly calibrated.

That the issue of uncertainty is illuminated to such a degree by examining current responses to terrorist violence exposes a particular quality of the policing of risk. For as Ericson and Haggerty (1997) among others have identified, contemporary policing is embedded within institutionalized risk communication systems. But what has been neglected in such debates is the presence and role of uncertainty. That is, how do policing agencies respond when the contours of a risk are only vaguely known? All risk and threat assessment methodologies seek to divine a degree of pattern and order in future events on the basis of past occurrences, but any such probabilistic calculations are contingent upon the knowledge base that can be compiled. Consequently, they are likely to be wrong some of the time—either predicting false-positives or false-negatives. Examining the current counterterrorism situation and concerns about the quantity and quality of intelligence that state authorities have available thereby illuminates traces of the more generalizable features of how policing responds and tries to reconfigure itself when it has only an opaque image of a problem to counter. Under such conditions, it seems that a tension arises between investing in and expanding extant practices and systems and more radical reconfiguration.

Given the long history of difficult relations between many minority communities and the police, it is probable that only a comparatively thin form of trust can be cultivated by police.

At the time of writing, one proposed response is to expand the resources available to the Security Service and Special Branch so that they can extend their

existing covert and undercover methods. A second response, not incompatible with the first, is legislative reform, introducing new laws intended to make it easier for suspects to be apprehended or prosecuted in some manner. But in assessing their respective potentials to reduce the terrorist threat, we should take seriously Lustgarten's (2003) contention that it is often through the political reactions that they trigger that terrorist acts work upon the legitimacy of the institutional orders of democratic states. Extending covert policing practices, where comparatively little public accountability or oversight is available, and rendering the law more assertive, run contrary to some of the key values of liberal democracy. Both of these measures require a degree of democratic freedom to be suspended by citizens in an effort to manufacture enhanced security.

In contrast to such responses, I have argued for a connecting of the conduct of "high" and "low" policing, accompanied by a rethinking of the nature and functions of intelligence. The particular advantages of NP are that it provides local communities with a degree of collective influence over how they are policed, and that in acting to address locally defined problems, neighborhood officers are well placed to generate trust and collect community intelligence. This connecting of trust and intelligence is important in that in traditional covert intelligence methodologies, the significance of trust could be glossed over on the basis that an informant exchanged their information for a financial or nonfinancial incentive. The rather different overt intelligence methodology being developed by NP renders generating and sustaining social trust far more critical. Given the long history of difficult relations between many minority communities and the police, it is probable that only a comparatively thin form of trust can be cultivated by police. Thin trust is always fragile, and in the particular context of counterterrorist work, tensions can easily develop between national security imperatives and local demands that have to be sensitively managed. Despite any such equivocations, on balance, it is an approach that, when compared with the alternatives, is more coherent with the key values of the liberal democratic tradition. This is notable given that the violence enacted by those affiliating to al-Qaeda is intended to destabilize the legitimacy of and ultimately undermine democratic processes. If this diagnosis is correct, then it would seem that democratic principles mediated through the institution of policing may provide a mechanism to effectively counter those who would seek to use violence to disrupt and destabilize democratic order.

Notes

1. See, for example, Keith Richbury, "Madrid Attacks May Have Targeted Election," *Washington Post*, October 17, 2004; and Isambard Williamson, "Election Blow to Bush's War on Terror," *Daily Telegraph,* March 15, 2004.

2. On the organization of al-Qaeda, see Manhattan Institute (2005, 9) and Burke (2003).

3. This includes minority ethnic groups, faith communities, and gay groups.

4. Reflecting the sensitivity of some of the data, these two forces have been made anonymous. In this article, respondents are identified by a unique number. For obvious security reasons, data on some issues have been edited.

5. Ten interviews were from the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), six from the southern force, and nine from the northern.

6. Special Branch was originally formed in the 1880s to deal with Irish terrorism and subsequently acquired a wider remit. Today all the main police forces in the United Kingdom have a Special Branch office with responsibilities for a variety of surveillance and clandestine policing functions, including aspects of counterterrorist activity.

7. The Muslim Contact Unit specialises in dealing with individuals from this faith community, whereas the Strategic Contact Unit has a wider remit dealing with a diverse array of community groups.

8. The concepts of "precrime" and "postcrime" are Zedner's (2005).

9. For example, following the bombings in London in July 2005, there was a 600 percent increase in the numbers of race hate and faith hate crimes reported to police ("Scapegoats: Huge Rise in Race Attacks across the UK," *The Independent*, August 4, 2005).

10. Brodeur (1983) distinguished between "high" and "low" policing, where the former is concerned with political and national security issues and the latter more routine everyday policing matters.

11. For a summary of the situation in Northern Ireland, see Ellison and Smyth (2000).

12. On the concept of soft power as applied to community policing, see Innes (2005).

13. On "thin" trust, see B. Williams (1988).

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