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Strategic Intelligence in Local Applications:

Evidences and Opportunities

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There is no denying the interrelatedness of federal, state, and local governments with respect to the war on terror. Strategic intelligence is interwoven in the process of this war, and there are certainly optimized practices and lessons learned from strategic intelligence that can be applied to the accomplishment of the organizational missions of local criminal justice agencies. There are several evidences of the strategic intelligence function in local criminal justice agencies that are pivotal to discuss. However, many agencies may not be using strategic intelligence to its fullest potential and capability.

In 1997, Virginia Beach Police officers served a search warrant for an apartment complex across the street from Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek – Fort Story. Several AK-47s, as well as photographs of the base's fence line and gate guard area were located in the search.¹ Again in 1997, Charles Deans and Mark Elliott robbed more than 20 businesses in numerous cities in the Hampton Roads region of Virginia.² In an unrelated matter, Mohammed Atta and Marwin Al-Shehhi travelled to Virginia Beach, Va., on Feb. 19, 2001.³ They rented a mailbox in Virginia Beach and cashed a check, and then in April 2001, they returned to Virginia Beach to close the mailbox they had rented. In 2007, a gentleman walked into a Virginia Beach Police Precinct to complain about being harassed by police officers. During his statement, he mentioned that he is from Iraq, that he could be considered a radical Muslim, and that he knew the Constitution of the United States better than most U.S. citizens. More chilling was his statement that he used the Constitution to his (radical) benefit. Since the war on terror began, Westboro Baptist Church has staged several demonstrations in the City of Virginia Beach

in order to protest soldiers who have died in the war on terror. In 2011, four groups of burglars were responsible for more than 60 burglaries per month in a burglary spree in just one zone of a single police precinct. From 1997 to 2011, the City of Virginia Beach experienced well more than 200 homicides, 9,000 robberies, 1,200 rapes, 25,000 burglaries, 9,000 auto thefts, and 150,000 larcenies. This is just an example of one city in the United States over a narrow span of time.

While it may seem that the previous paragraph is disjointed and lacking in theme or unifying connection, it is, in fact, what transpired beyond the words which give it relevance. In a mere 286 words, many criminal justice agencies are represented behind the scenes:

- Virginia Beach PD
- Norfolk PD
- FBI
- Chesapeake PD
- Portsmouth PD
- Joint Terrorism Task Force

Many others, including the Virginia State Police and NCIS could also be noted for their added support from the VCIN and LINX databases. Moreover, the various personnel assigned to tasks that directly act on the incidents above or support those who are acting on those incidents would be well beyond the scope of this article. The same agencies, along with their subsidiaries and employees, during the time span above had a vast amount of information available to them from both the open source arena as well as secure databases.

There are various types of intelligence, two of which are commonly employed in local law enforcement. Operational intelligence applies to the routine, everyday workings of the jurisdiction, while tactical intelligence is more situation-specific; their applications are often specialized and divided between the duties of regular officers and those of SWAT teams. While local criminal justice organizations are familiar with operational and tactical levels of intelligence, when the term strategic intelligence is mentioned, one can easily draw the lines between Atta and Al-Shehhi and the use of intelligence. The hosts of agencies that support the intelligence function on the national level commonly come to mind. On the state and

¹ (self, author testimony)

² Commonwealth of Virginia v. Charles Deans, Jr., <http://wasdmz2.courts.state.va.us/CJISWeb/circuit.html>. Search Virginia Beach Circuit; input Court Case Number CR97004281-00 (Filed 1997).

³ The 9/11 Commission Report. National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. 2004. <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/911/report/911Report.pdf>, (accessed 25 April 2012).

local levels, State Fusion Centers and Joint Terrorism Liaisons help bridge gaps in intergovernmental intelligence sharing capabilities. Notwithstanding this functional bridge between the gaps of federal, state, and local government intelligence sharing, local law enforcement has a pressing need to develop strategic intelligence strategies. After exploring the basic construction of strategic intelligence in the law enforcement community, one will notice areas in which strategic intelligence could be tactically applied. Upon gaining a basic understanding of underdeveloped applications of strategic intelligence on the local level, new research, writing, analysis, and discussion must be conducted to maximize this potential.

Intelligence and analysis are woven together in a complex system of problem solving which begins with data collection and its dissection, evaluation, and interpretation, in order to calculate threats, risks, patterns, and opportunities. Strategic intelligence is a specific form of research and analysis that allows organizations to assess and describe threats, risks, and opportunities in such a manner that helps shape or determine programs.⁴ Strategic intelligence answers the question, “What can we do about it at a practical level?”⁵ It is essential to recognize that in the context of local enforcement agencies, strategic intelligence is a function of program and policy decisions spanning a broad range of time. Strategic intelligence, in the context of enforcement, seems to complement operational (tactical) intelligence. Whereas operational intelligence is concerned with day-to-day activities and specific individual targets, strategic intelligence continues from that point toward the identification of crime trends affecting the law enforcement community, both locally and as a whole. Strategic intelligence is a powerful management tool for police practitioners. An expert on the subject aptly states that, “...unless management is committed to acquiring strategic insights into problem solving, there is little likelihood of real change driven by analysts themselves doing strategic research.”⁶

⁴ McDowell, Don. Strategic Intelligence: A Handbook for Practitioners, Managers, and Users. (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 5.

⁵ Ibid, 5.

⁶ Ibid, 7.

Certainly, the incorporation of tactical, operational, and strategic intelligence into local applications in the form of intelligence-led policing (ILP) is not new to the law enforcement community. The Bureau of Justice Assistance sponsored research entitled Intelligence-Led Policing: The New Intelligence Architecture from as early as 2005.⁷ An effective argument could be made that applications of operational/tactical and strategic intelligence are not mutually exclusive; rather, they overlap at their fringes. A logical starting point from which to capitalize on the intersection of local law enforcement, operational intelligence, and strategic intelligence is found in the implementation of Community Oriented Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) and CompStat.

The U.S. Department of Justice Community Oriented Policing Services (USDOJCOPS) describes three key components to community policing: community partnerships, organizational transformation, and problem solving.⁸ Those in law enforcement recognize the problem-solving component in the acronym “SARA”: scanning, analysis, response, and assessment. Those in academia can relate this type of model to learning organizations, double loop learning, and the work of Argyris and Schon⁹ and Senge.¹⁰ According to USDOJCOPS, Community Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) is a philosophy that “promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problem solving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.”¹¹ Although this DOJ definition concerns itself with immediate conditions, the three key components of community policing suggests more of an overarching, long-range objective. Paradigm shifts

⁷ Intelligence – Led Policing: The New Intelligence Architecture. United States Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Assistance, 2005. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/bja/210681.pdf>, (accessed 25 April 2012).

⁸ Community Policing Defined. United States Department of Justice, Community Oriented Policing Services. <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/Default.asp?Item=36>, (accessed 25 April 2012).

⁹ Argyris, Chris and Donald Schon. Organizational Learning: A Theory of Action Perspective. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978).

¹⁰ Senge, Peter M. The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1990).

¹¹ Community Policing Defined.

in law enforcement organizations, within the realm of police and community relations, and the context of the social change needed in a community to address crime, social disorder, and fear of crime; are not immediate conditions. These shifts occur over time with sound, informed policy decisions.

Intelligence as a whole is problem solving that involves data gathering, analysis, interpretations, and a look forward to threats, risks, patterns, and opportunities. Strategic intelligence is a specific form of research and analysis that allows organizations to assess and describe threats, risks, and opportunities in such a manner as to help shape or determine programs and policies. Hence, the unified concept of community policing, intelligence, and strategic intelligence is a natural fit. Yet, this logically invites several questions to explore:

- For an individual agency using strategic intelligence, what can be done on a practical level to accomplish the mission of community policing?
- Are there any evidences of strategic intelligence supporting community policing efforts?
- If there are indeed evidences of Strategic intelligence supporting COP, have optimal practices been developed?
- Are strategic intelligence functions being applied to their maximum potential with respect to community policing?
- For agencies not currently integrating strategic intelligence into their community policing philosophies, how could the two concepts be blended most effectively?

These questions should provide a springboard of thought for future articles on applications of strategic intelligence in local-level criminal justice community policing programs. The interaction of intelligence work in support of community policing should not be discounted in gaining a greater capability to

concentrate on solving problems by providing clarity on trends, changes, threats, and opportunities.

CompStat is a tool familiar to most criminal justice practitioners. There are a growing number of local police departments employing CompStat to address crime in their jurisdictions. There are four key CompStat principles: accurate and timely intelligence, effective tactics, rapid deployment of resources, and relentless follow-up and assessment.¹² At first glance one might assess CompStat as more of a function of operational intelligence. However, upon participation in dozens of CompStat meetings and utilizing the CompStat process for patrol plan development, it is reasonable to affirm that the process encompasses the operational intelligence realm and the realm of police work which “assess and describe threats, risks, and opportunities in such a manner that helps shape or determine programs and policies.”¹³ The CompStat process looks at past crime data, future trend analysis, as well as present and future operational capacity to assist short- and long-term policy decisions on the deployment of resources. For the practitioner, there is even an individual area commander responsibility component as well. The CompStat process has resulted in significant percentages of personnel deployment shifts over a considerable allotment of time. Additionally, through data-driven analysis, the utilization of CompStat has been responsible for significant policy changes in some departments.

Again, it is noteworthy to consider that the CompStat process includes both components of operational intelligence and strategic intelligence. Furthermore, in the CompStat process there seem to be common threads connecting familiar terms such as evidenced-based policing as well as less familiar terms including strategic intelligence, operational intelligence, and Argyris, Schon, and Senge’s Learning Organizations. This again leads to questions of viability:

- Are there any evidences of strategic intelligence reinforcing CompStat?

¹² Karen Hess and Christine Orthmann. *Introduction to Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice*. (Clifton Park, NY: Cengage, 2009), 260.

¹³ McDowell, 5.

- If so, have optimized practices been discovered and developed?
- Are strategic intelligence functions being integrated with CompStat to their full potential?
- For agencies not currently incorporating strategic intelligence into their CompStat process, how could they most effectively synthesize the two concepts?

The International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts (IALEIA) and the United States Department of Justice produced a booklet entitled *Law Enforcement Analytic Standards 2012*, which clarifies some of the intelligence sources. For law enforcement organizations which may not be well-versed in intelligence and its processes, the IALEIA and the DOJ note the following sources or areas of analysis:¹⁴

- bank, business, and telephone records
- activity, commodity, and event flows
- associations
- net worth
- organization
- conversation
- visuals
- time series
- crime pattern
- source and application of funds
- vulnerability
- statistics
- geography
- investigations
- frequency distribution
- threat warnings

One must ask what other methods could be added to bolster the strategic intelligence ability of local law enforcement agencies, as well as how these methods could be used in Community Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS). How these methods could be used in the CompStat process is yet another area to explore. A final pair of considerations is asking which other local law enforcement areas could find strategic intelligence to be useful, and what training is needed for analysts and decision makers alike in order

to understand the place and applications of strategic intelligence on their levels.

Following the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, federal, state, local law enforcement, and intelligence agencies found themselves bound together in a unified mission. Pathways for information sharing among the various agencies in all levels of government were formed as each agency began to work more closely with its peers. There has been ample demonstration of the evidence of and need for strategic intelligence implementation in local law enforcement agencies. The use of Community Policing and Problem Solving (COPPS) methods and CompStat show promise for the application of strategic intelligence. Professionals using COPPS and CompStat must ask whether or not they are using the strategic intelligence function to its fullest capacity; likewise, professionals not utilizing strategic intelligence to complement their COPPS or CompStat process should consider including this function in order to maximize their results. All local law enforcement professionals should search within their own organizations for opportunities to use the strategic intelligence function to enhance their organizational mission fulfillment. In doing so, they may discover the key to greater effectiveness in protecting and serving their jurisdictions and the United States as a whole.

¹⁴ *Law Enforcement Analytic Standards*. United States Department of Justice and the International Association of Law Enforcement Intelligence Analysts. 2012. it.ojp.gov/documents/law_enforcement_analytic_standards.pdf, (accessed 25 April 2012).