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THE ROLE OF LOCAL POLICE IN COUNTER- TERRORISM ACTIVITY

Most experts in the study of terrorism point to the French Revolution as the starting point for modern terrorism. Not surprisingly, there was a period during the French Revolution known as the Reign of Terror. During the Reign of Terror, tens of thousands were executed for their perceived resistance to the revolution. Martha Crenshaw, an internationally renowned expert on terrorism studies, retired professor, and former Guggenheim Fellow, [argues that terrorism exists “in the context of violent resistance to the state as well as in the service of state interests.”](#) Crenshaw’s point, that terrorism exists as violent resistance against the state, certainly holds true during the French Revolution. Walter Reich, professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at George Washington University [tells us “terrorism is an expression of political strategy.”](#) Crenshaw and Reich, both, provide important arguments demonstrating some of the theories behind modern terrorism fll.

For decades, [international terrorist organizations have spread their networks across the globe.](#) More recently, the Internet has allowed them to identify and communicate with sympathizers

anywhere in the world, who can be radicalized and carry out attacks where they live.

In most cases, local officers' training supports the assumption that international terrorism is not something of significant concern to them; domestic threats are where their focus lies. It turns out, though, that police officers on the beat do have opportunities to assist efforts against international terrorism. Take, for example, a 2005 investigation into a chain of robberies by the Los Angeles Police Department, which [found that the thefts were an attempt to finance a series of terrorist bombings](#) of military bases and houses of worship around Los Angeles by the radical Islamic group Jamiyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh. In some cases, as in Los Angeles, police officers working local cases can uncover links to international groups seeking to wreak havoc on, and within, the U.S. [2]

To shift this mindset so officers see a bigger picture of fighting terrorism requires one thing: enhanced training. Police departments should seek out continuous training about the current state of international terrorism and the indicators beat officers on U.S. streets might see. Nearby field offices of federal agencies can offer support, often at no cost to the local department. These agencies could provide:

- Training sessions that would help officers understand the validity of the threat

- Information about what types of activities to look for while on patrol

- Points of contact if patrol officers encounter suspicious people or activities

- Assistance developing emergency response plans for when attacks do occur

One of the most effective strategies is one already in use for other purposes, one commonly referred to by the phrase "eyes and ears."

Just as departments rely on neighborhood watch groups and civilian patrols to be extra sets of eyes and ears for their officers, it is crucial for these same officers to act as extra eyes and ears for the various federal agencies that investigate terrorism cases. This does not really require any new skills from officers; they are on the

lookout for suspicious activity just as they normally would be, but with a heightened cognizance of the terrorist threat. This eyes and ears strategy can be highly effective, as officers typically have unimpeded access when patrolling high-potential targets such as airports, seaports, bus/subway terminals, churches, schools, shopping malls, U.S. landmarks, sports arenas, hospitals, and tourist attractions. [2]

Officers also daily patrol the same roads that terrorists use to travel and transport materials to be used in their attacks. Further, if terrorists are seeking to avoid detection by living and planning their attacks in rural areas where counterterrorism efforts are not heavily concentrated, local officers are the most likely to encounter them.

In fact, the Bureau of Justice Statistics says local police officers outnumber federal agents by a ratio of almost 10:1. Local officers are therefore far more likely than federal counterterrorism agents to encounter suspicious activity that could be related to terrorism. It also means they will be the first to respond should an attack occur. Increasing their awareness of the potential to encounter international terrorism while on their daily beats will help local officers fight international crimes as well as domestic ones. [3]

Local police are the best personnel who can prevent the terror attacks by deactivating the sleeper cells and terror groups if they go after the basic principles of policing including patrolling, information gathering, and surveillance of suspects of the area concerned. They are the appropriate persons in a good position to find out and investigate local terrorist threats, and they can work to neutralize the sleeper cells and ensure that vulnerable targets in their jurisdictions are protected. The former home affairs minister P Chidambaram once rightly observed that “There is no substitute for the policeman who walks the streets. He is the gatherer of intelligence, the enforcer of the law, the preventer of the offence, the investigator of the crime and the standard-bearer of the authority of the State, all rolled into one. If he is not there, it means that all these functions are not performed.”

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