Building Bridges to Strengthen America
Forging an Effective Counterterrorism Enterprise Between Muslim Americans & Law Enforcement

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Part 6
A New Direction: Community-Oriented Policing

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A New Direction: Community-Oriented Policing for Counterterrorism

The previous section highlighted controversial policies employed by various national security and law enforcement agencies, which are not only contrary to democratic values, but ineffective strategies. This report, however, is does not limit itself to critiquing certain policies; it seeks a new direction forward.

Earlier we briefly mentioned the challenge of competing against terrorist firms in the “market for martyrs” and the need for a partnered solution – a “business merger” – between Muslim communities and law enforcement. The proposed partnership is based on a community-oriented policing model. This section spells out the details of a community-oriented policing-based counterterrorism enterprise and the separate, but interrelated roles Muslim American communities and law enforcement should play in tackling radicalization and violent extremism.

Introduction to Community-Oriented Policing

In order to successfully compete against terrorist firms and drive them out of the market for martyrs, law enforcement and Muslim communities should partner with each other based on a community-oriented policing model. Such a model is not only more respectful of community concerns than other forms of policing and information collection, it is also more effective by filling in a critical intelligence gap that other surveillance methods are unable to fill.

Before going further, it is important to better understand the terms “community-oriented policing” and “community” with respect to law enforcement activities. According to a Police Executive Research Forum report, Defining the “Community” in Community Policing, law enforcement agencies typically define communities along three lines.¹

1) **Geography** – where people live and/or work;
2) **Shared Identity** – groups of individuals with common demographic characteristics such as ethnicity, race, age, socio-economic status, religion, etc.;
3) **Common Concerns/Problems** – this may include common problems of high rates of violent crimes, etc.

The report goes on to recommend that police agencies enhance their understanding of communities, “not by adding factors, but by expanding upon the paradigms within which we view each factor.”² For example, an expanded view of geography within a residential neighborhood may also include a civic center or a warehouse complex. An expanded view of
common concerns may also include shared challenges within an area like a business or recreational zone or a region recovering from a natural disaster. As a result, it can enhance officers’ ability to be responsive to the needs and challenges facing communities, in order to build stronger, more effective relationships.

The concept of community-oriented policing lacks a single definition and perhaps is best described as a broad philosophy. It emerged from a series of police practice innovations in the 1980s and “is primarily focused on community partnerships and crime prevention.” It seeks to reduce and prevent crime not only through enforcement of criminal law, but also through administrative and civil law, conflict mediation and resolution, and joint problem solving with social services groups.

Whereas traditional policing is reactive and tends to distance itself from local citizens, community-oriented policing regularly communicates with the community and partners with it to proactively tackle issues of crime, fear of crime, disorder, and quality-of-life concerns. Under community-oriented policing, public attitudes toward the police are more important than in traditional policing.

According to Matthew Scheider and Robert Chapman, Senior Analysts at the Department of Justice’s Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, community-oriented policing is based on three interrelated elements: 1) organizational change, 2) problem solving and 3) external partnerships.

The first element is organizational change within law enforcement, which requires revising internal processes “that define organizational culture and activities.” The two most salient revisions would be a decentralization of the management structure, and creating focused geographic responsibility for patrol officers.

Decentralization of management would create a more “democratized” policing culture, allowing for greater input and information sharing internally from officers of all ranks. It encourages greater innovation among beat officers adapt to changing circumstances on the street and promotes a knowledge-building environment by critically evaluating minor mistakes rather than automatically punishing for them. Externally, democratized management promotes greater institutional transparency and trust by encouraging expert advice as well as feedback from community members.

Focused geographic responsibility for officers complements the trust-building aspects of democratized management. When assigned to fixed geographic areas of a community for an extended period of time, an officer learns about the issues that community members are facing, develops channels of communication with residents, and enhances police accountability with the residents of that area. All of this serves to create the foundations of understanding and trust that eventually produce the community knowledge officers use to tackle various types of crime, including terrorism.

The second aspect of community-oriented policing is problem solving. As a part of community-oriented policing’s proactive orientation, beat officers seek to address underlying conditions that foster crime and disorder in order to prevent future problems. This requires
developing custom-made strategies for each community based on analysis from a wide variety of information sources.\textsuperscript{10}

The third component to community-oriented policing is external partnerships. This is critical to developing the proper information about challenges facing a community and the right types of solutions to those challenges. Partnerships involve good working relations with a wide variety of government agencies, as well as community members.\textsuperscript{11}

\textit{Community-Oriented Policing for Counterterrorism as a Product Extension Merger}

Returning to the market analogy, what this report proposes is akin to a product-extension merger. A “product extension” is when two companies selling different and non-competing, but related products in the same market join together.\textsuperscript{12} An example of a product-extension merger would be a car manufacturer and a tire supplier teaming up under one umbrella.

The nature of the merger would be based on a collaborative “courtship/just friends” relationship. Such a relationship seeks “to achieve an effective working relationship between the two companies rather than complete integration.”\textsuperscript{13} Mergers form for several reasons, two of which are relevant to this paper: synergy and increased market share.

Similarly, we propose a product-extension merger between law enforcement and Muslim Americans. Each partner has a set of particular strengths that can, if combined together, minimize each other’s weaknesses and create an effective synergy. This synergy would allow it to more effectively compete against terrorist firms in the “market for martyrs.”

Therefore, the proposed bi-lateral approach simultaneously requires a division labor, while maintaining a collaborative relationship. First, the division of labor.

Law enforcement must focus its energies on counterterrorism (i.e. criminal activities), not counterradicalization. The best antidote to extremism is the free marketplace place of ideas, including within Muslim communities. While law enforcement activities are not explicitly counterradicalization efforts in the sense that there is a direct counter-information effort directed at extremists, certain surveillance strategies – such as the heavy and underregulated use of informants and wiretaps – end up having a similar practical effect. They end up creating a chilling effect on entire communities’ exercise of free speech and prevent extremist ideologies to be effectively confronted by fellow congenerats.\textsuperscript{14}

Law enforcement must ensure its efforts are precise so that limited resources are used efficiently and done in a manner respectful of civil liberties and civil rights. Mechanisms for legal redress and policy input must also be made available to correct mistakes. Otherwise, it will create a deeper sense of grievances that terrorists can exploit by creating an easier environment to operate in – hiding within communities who may be fearful and less willing to cooperate with law enforcement. (In fact a recent study by the University of Chicago Law School found Muslim Americans are much more likely to assist counterterrorism efforts if they believe law enforcement is a legitimate institution by acting fairly under the law toward
their communities.\textsuperscript{15} The heightened sense of fear and grievances also adds to communities’ sense of alienation and pushes them away from the civic process.

Muslim communities’ main task is counterradicalization efforts through better religious education, social programs and long-term constructive political engagement. These efforts would inoculate communities against radicalization by making communities religiously literate and foster strong social networks of mainstream Muslims through social services and programming, and invest in long-term growth of civil society groups. Furthermore, given their familiarity with other community members and unique cultural and linguistic competencies (which law enforcement continues to lack),\textsuperscript{16} they assist by providing law enforcement with extra information that can lead to terrorist arrests.\textsuperscript{17}

Law enforcement should work on clamping down on terrorist firms’ ability to operate within the market for martyrs – terrorists’ “entrepreneurial activities” – while Muslim communities should work on drying up the market itself. Law enforcement needs to make sure its actions do not undermine Muslim communities’ efforts and thus end up expanding the market for martyrs. Muslim communities need to maintain their willingness to assist legitimate law enforcement efforts to clamp down on terrorist firms’ ability operate within the market without impunity.

**Principles of Law Enforcement Engagement to Muslim Communities**

The relationship between law enforcement and Muslim communities is a two-way street. This section focuses on what law enforcement can do to productively engage Muslim communities, as well as other law enforcement challenges dealing with immigrant and minority communities. The following are a list of essential principles for law enforcement to consider:

1. **Decisions and assessments of Muslim communities must be made based on credible information.** Law enforcement must make sure that whatever judgments it makes about Muslim communities must come from credible sources. There is a cottage industry of individuals who seek to distort the image of Islam and Muslims. While everyone has the right to free speech, bigotry masquerading in scholarship without solid analysis is counterproductive when applied to counterterrorism.\textsuperscript{18} Therefore, it is essential that law enforcement get the correct information to make the best assessments possible.

2. **Respect for communities’ civil rights and civil liberties.** Many (but not all) Muslim communities – whether immigrant or indigenous African Americans – have negative perceptions of the police. The reasons for this perception vary among community and racial/ethnic group. For some, it is based on issues of race in America, while for others the police as an institution were regarded as instruments of oppression in their homeland.\textsuperscript{19} This creates an automatic barrier to police community outreach. In the current political climate, the actions of certain law enforcement agencies – whether spying on peaceful activist groups and houses of worship without reasonable suspicion, or religious profiling – have added to difficulties. These actions are not only contrary to American political values, they are
counterproductive by eliciting fear within communities and making individuals less likely to cooperate with law enforcement. They also create a chilling effect on the exercise of free speech within communities. This makes it difficult for communities to effectively confront extremist ideas if all congregants – including mainstream worshippers – feel they will be the subject of an investigation.

3. **Move away from a “securitized” relationship.** Muslim communities must broaden their engagement with civil society and the government beyond law enforcement. It is critical for civil society organizations to provide Muslim youth and mosques with the tools needed to enter into other policy issues such as civil rights, health and education. Even if one were to look at this purely from a security perspective, a relationship based on fear of terrorism only adds to communities’ sense of isolation and alienation. This also undermines the foundation of trust needed between law enforcement and Muslim American communities to elicit information in case a real threat exists. A community-oriented policing model uses a wide range of tools, beyond criminal law enforcement to control and prevent crime. Putting Muslim Americans in touch with a variety of social services to help vulnerable segments of their communities, such as ex-convicts, as community-oriented policing initiatives have done with other communities, is one helpful approach. Another is partnering with communities to educate communities about reporting hate crimes or helping parents teach their children about protecting against Internet-based predators.

4. **Leave the counterradicalization to Muslim communities.** As mentioned earlier, the partnership must be premised on a division of labor. Law enforcement should focus on terrorists’ criminal activities; Muslims have been, and must continue to be at the forefront of the ideological issues. Aside from a respect for civil rights and liberties, law enforcement must make sure its actions avoid the theological and political issues Muslim communities must deal with themselves. Doing otherwise is a task law enforcement are ill-tasked to handle and will undermine mainstream Muslim voices.

**The Role of Muslim Community Partners**

Up to this point, the discussion on community-oriented policing has focused on how law enforcement can obtain information from community members to prevent a possible terrorist attack. However, communities – in this particular case, Muslim Americans – can and must play a greater role beyond being largely passive sources of information. Muslim American communities can serve an important counterradicalization role through intellectual and social service initiatives that create a hostile environment for terrorist recruitment. While law enforcement focuses on counterterrorism (criminal activity), Muslim communities can protect the nation through counterradicalization efforts.

On the ideological front, Muslim American leaders and communities have been very strong and consistent in their denunciations of terrorism since 9/11. Studies on the backgrounds of Muslim terrorists consistently show such individuals tend to lack a firm foundation in religious knowledge. This view has not been lost on the religious leadership. Prominent
traditionalist Muslim scholar Abdal Hakim Murad denounces Al-Qaeda and its ideologically like-minded groups as those who “embrace a very secular heresy.” As mentioned earlier, thousands of other high-level Muslim scholars back this denunciation of Al-Qaeda’s terrorism, along with its distortion of Islam through the misuse of jihad and takfir (excommunication).

At the grassroots level specifically within the United States, the Muslim Public Affairs Council developed and disseminated its National Grassroots Campaign to Fight Terrorism. The Campaign was endorsed by the Islamic Society North America, the largest Muslim umbrella organization in the United States.

However, intellectual responses like denunciation and prominent legal opinions are not the only response Muslim communities must take to effective prevent radicalism. As our earlier analysis of terrorist recruitment highlighted, the issue is far more complex than merely the presence of radical ideologies and specific extremist personalities. Identity crises, largely based on perceptions of injustice and exclusion, and the presence of social networks are also extremely important factors leading to violent extremism.

Here, Muslim institutions and communities must also take a lead role. Muslim Americans must have the necessary social services available to them to inoculate their communities, including the most vulnerable members, against extremist ideologies. A vibrant civil society is necessary to the long-term defeat of extremist ideas. It ensures Muslims’ energies are channeled into mainstream activism that secures full integration into American society through political and civic engagement rather than fostering isolation and alienation that breeds extremism. Civil society organizations must be well-resourced to engage in activities relevant to individuals’ needs and maintain their credibility among communities.

Communities must expand their social service outreach by either developing their own faith-based organizations partnering with other outside private or public organizations. Attention must be given to social programming that expands religious literacy and addresses social issues relevant to youth relevant like drug use, peer pressure and understanding one’s Muslim American identity. Community and religious leaders who have the language and cultural expertise to connect to all members of their community – including youth and converts – must lead these programs.

Fortunately, Muslim Americans tend to be better integrated in terms of socio-economic status than European Muslims are. However, that does not mean Muslim Americans are completely immune to the problems of extremism facing European Muslim communities. If issues facing Muslim Americans are not tackled in a thorough and multifaceted approach, challenges of preventing radicalization among Muslim Americans can become more difficult.

The current challenge of extremism among British Muslims serves as an example of the negative consequences of inadequate community leadership failing to effectively address relevant social issues. Some British Muslims’ lack of English-language skills and their cultural disconnect from the broader British society have led youth congregants to seek religious guidance from those able to address their concerns. Sadly, this includes some youth who have drifted into extremist groups.
Furthermore, a long-term vision of Muslim institution building is necessary to develop social, political and intellectual growth of Muslim American communities. Civil liberties-focused groups have the advantage of typically being able to deal with legal issues in ways that long term policy-engagement organizations are not equipped to handle at all. Policy-oriented organizations are different in that they tackle problems in their early stages or even before they form.

If Muslim American communities seek to maximize their public policy influence and representation at local, state and federal levels, a better balance of policy and legal advocacy is needed. Their unique approaches to public policy and political influence may have their advantages and their disadvantages. They are not only complimentary, but necessary for the ongoing development and growth of Muslim American communities.

**Why Community-Oriented Policing?**

Informants are an extremely important tool and can be used to great effectiveness in various kinds of criminal investigations, including counterterrorism cases. According to Boston College Law Professor Robert Bloom, there are two types of informants: the “incidental informer” and the “confidential informer.”

This study focuses on the use of confidential informants, with respect to counterterrorism activities. Modern American policing has similar examples of legitimate and illegitimate uses of informants. The FBI has successfully used them against the organized crime syndicates, such as various mafia crime bosses in the 1980s. Former FBI counterterrorism agent Michael German has also described firsthand how informants – employed in a Constitutionally-sound manner – were effective in bringing down violent anti-government extremists and Neo-Nazi terrorists. However it has also abused their use, such as the investigation, infiltration and sabotage of radical but mostly non-violent groups under its Counterintelligence Program, or COINTELPRO.

We propose an information gathering model that shifts some of the emphasis away from traditional methods, such as the heavy use of informants, and towards a more community-oriented policing-based methodology.

There are three tactical reasons for this. First, intelligence-led policing models introduce a strong analytical bias that is not necessarily relevant to counterterrorism. Intelligence-led policing tends to focus on repeating criminal offenders and suspect networks. This bias is largely due to problems with managing extremely large volumes of information generated and seeking to identify those few nuggets of vital information that indicate a real threat in a sea of mundane data. The result is that intelligence-led policing focuses mostly on repeat profiles and particular networks of individuals; however, it fails to identify threats emanating from other individuals outside of these specific networks. This problem is especially likely to occur in a U.S. domestic context where terrorists appear favor cellular or “lone wolf” strategies, rather than being strongly connected to a network of other violent extremists.
Intelligence-led policing, particularly at the community level, also has a tendency to rely heavily on covert informants. The tactical and strategic limitations have been discussed at length earlier in this report.

As a quick recap:

- **Informants provide a limited intelligence picture.** Given the focused nature of informants, it leaves out important context, leaving an intelligence gap. This is especially the case where communities are fragmented and no one source of information is able to provide a full picture of the communities where terrorists operate within and/or plan to execute an attack against. This also makes it harder to verify the trustworthiness of the information being provided.  

- **Informants are of limited value when dealing with cellular structures.** In networked hierarchical structures, penetration of an organization by one asset is likely to yield a great deal of information on the entire group as members are more likely to be in communication with one another. However, in a “leaderless” cellular structure, information and members are compartmentalized. Furthermore, penetration of one cell is less likely to yield information on other potential violent extremists, as opposed to a networked organization.

- **Questionable use of informants undermines the strategic asset of strong community-law enforcement relations.** Muslim communities may be less willing to cooperate with law enforcement based on a sense of “betrayal,” especially if they perceive terrorism busts to be cases of entrapment or provocation. It also undermines the credibility of mainstream religious leaders who advocate for engagement with law enforcement.

In order to achieve maximum effectiveness of information gathering, they will need to be supplemented with other information gathering methods, namely community knowledge. Furthermore, legal mechanisms and internal guidelines need to be strengthened to ensure informants actually prevent real criminal activity, not spy on innocent individuals.

**How Community-Oriented Policing Develops Community Knowledge**

Before the relationship between communities helping construct law enforcement’s understanding their crime challenges, it is important to first define the term “community knowledge.” This report the term as follows:

> …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 [such as informants] — the quality that, according to the dictates of police culture, provides criminal or crime intelligence with unique purchase… Whereas criminal intelligence tends to target particular individuals, and crime intelligence particular incident types, [community knowledge] covers a range of issues, frequently being used by police to build a picture of the contextual risks that a particular community group feels concerns about. [Community knowledge] 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 networks.
Many community-oriented policing strategies have tended to rely on strong relations with a few strategic contacts as a means of engaging with communities and obtaining information from them where historically relations may have been difficult. However, such an approach is limited because it forces police to derive information from a limited number of sources even though important bits of intelligence are spread across many community residents.

A more diffuse means of community knowledge building, beyond a core set of “strategic contacts,” is needed. In this context, research by Stanford University sociologist Mark Granovetter is extremely helpful. Granovetter’s research found individuals were able to collect diffuse information more effectively by relying on a network of people with loose ties, rather than relying a small number of close contacts. Granovetter referred to this social phenomenon as the “strength of weak ties.” A diffusion of information problem is also something seen fairly frequently in intelligence and community-oriented policing issues. According to one study on counterterrorism and community knowledge:

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.

Therefore, an integrated approach to community knowledge building is needed. Rather than replacing strategic contacts and intelligence-led policing approaches, law enforcement shift toward greater emphasis on community-oriented policing. Despite playing the dominant role in information gathering methods, it would not replace other approaches; it would be supplemented by them. The result is a combined information gathering strategy that blends the strengths of each approach and minimizes its weaknesses.

However, eliciting a better understanding of community jurisdiction cannot be done in a haphazard way. It must be done systematically, with high precision and accuracy, and great care. Under a community-oriented policing model, this would be done by tackling community problems through a process of scanning, analysis, response and assessment (SARA). Scheider and Chapman elaborate:

Departments first identify relevant or perceived crime problems (scanning), determine the nature and underlying conditions that give rise to those problems (analysis), craft and implement interventions that are linked to that analysis (response), and evaluate its effectiveness (assessment). The process is understood as continually involving feedback among the components. For instance, through in-depth analysis, agencies may come to define problems differently, effectively returning to the scanning phase. Likewise, an assessment may determine that a response was ineffective and that the problem requires additional analysis.

In the United Kingdom, such a method for enhanced SARA has been pioneered by researchers Martin Innes and Colin Roberts at the Universities’ Police Science Institute. They used a two-pronged method of information collection and analysis. The first method involves consensual individual-level street interviews with average community residents, called a “conversation with a purpose” (CWAP).
The premise behind CWAPing is “to ensure that whenever police staff interact with a member of the public who was not a victim, witness or suspect to some other incident, they saw it as an opportunity to check on any concerns that the citizen may have [regarding disorder and hard crimes with a neighborhood] and if there were, to collect intelligence upon it.” By CWAPing with local community members, beat officers can enhance their understanding about a particular area, and the challenges it faces.

CWAPing is coupled with special software running on a tablet PC to make the interview more structured and better analyze the information from the interview. At this point, the information from a CWAP is interfaced and analyzed by specialized crime mapping software. It is an electronic tool that assists beat patrol officers’ analysis by deriving its information from CWAPs with community members who identify local concerns within a specific geographic area, ranging “from physical disorder right through to major crimes.”

That location is broken down into a smaller subset of equally-sized cells which “equates to a sampling frame for building community knowledge. Individuals are then selected for interviews [CWAPs] and these interactions are conducted by local police staff…” The information from all of the interviews within limited geographic confines are then processed to match a correlation between problems and specific locations where several interview community members mention the same problem(s) taking place.
Endnotes

2 Ibid., P. 7.
3 Ibid., P. 7.
5 Ibid., P. 55.
8 Ibid., P. 356.
10 Scheider and Chapman, “Community Policing and Terrorism.”
11 Ibid.
13 Ibid., P. 80.
18 For citations, see footnote 13.
19 For a comparative case study analysis between community policing in Minneapolis among African-American and Somali communities, that illustrates this point, see: Dennis L. Jensen, Enhancing Homeland Security Efforts by Building Strong Relationships Between the Muslim Community and

20 Even this latter aspect of community-oriented policing has an important public safety benefit. For instance, in a January 2010 Senate Foreign Relations Committee report, law enforcement officials expressed concern that upon leaving prison, a number of American ex-convicts went to Yemen and “had disappeared and are suspected of having gone to Al-Qaeda training camps in ungoverned portions of the impoverished country.” “Al Qaeda in Yemen and Somalia: A Ticking Time Bomb.” United States Senate Foreign Relations Committee, (January 20, 2010). Available at: http://foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/AP%20Qaeda%20in%20Yemen%20and%20Somalia.pdf, P. 3.


27 German, Thinking Like A Terrorist, P. 14-15.


31 Ibid., P. 9.


34 Harris, “Law Enforcement and Intelligence Gathering in Muslim.”


39 Innes and Roberts, “Community Intelligence in the Policing of Community Safety,” P. 5

40 Scheider and Chapman, “Community Policing and Terrorism,”


42 Ibid., P. 6.


Founded in 1988, MPAC is an American institution which informs and shapes public opinion and policy by serving as a trusted resource to decision makers in government, media and policy institutions. MPAC is also committed to developing leaders with the purpose of enhancing the political and civic participation of Muslim Americans.

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