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Using Counter Insurgency Tactics, Techniques and Procedures to
Defeat Gangs in U.S. Cities
EWS Contemporary Issue Paper
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6 January 2007

Report Documentation Page

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

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1. REPORT DATE 06 JAN 2007		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2007 to 00-00-2007	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Using Counter Insurgency Tactics, Techniques and Procedures to Defeat Gangs in U.S. Cities				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps, Command and Staff College, Marine Corps Combat Dev, Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street, Quantico, VA, 22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 13	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

For years, law makers and local governments have used tough anti-gang legislation and police crackdowns as the preferred method of decreasing gang violence in the United States (U.S.). Despite spending millions of dollars and building new prisons to house gang members, crime related to gangs have not decreased.¹ In fact, some studies suggest gang violence has increased in many cities. ² To defeat gangs in major U.S. cities, law enforcement agencies should employ the following counterinsurgency techniques used by the military, which drastically reduced violence in Iraq: Development of community relationships, establishment of city programs to better the community, and protection of the population from intimidation and violence.³

Developing Relationships

Local government agencies should focus on developing better community relationships as one avenue to defeat gangs in major cities inside the United States. Coalition forces in Iraq have, after years of fighting insurgents, benefited from establishing a working rapport with "Imams and Sheikhs" in Al Anbar Province, Iraq.⁴ This approach to defeating an insurgency actively involves the community and is productive in transcending cultural boundaries.

Relationships developed between the government and local communities or the military and local communities, require time and effort to be considered effective. The established laws over a city must be relevant and the "administration of the local government" must be impartial to all communities.⁵ In Iraq, commanders who actively sought to build lasting relationships witnessed the most improvements in their area of operations. Col Charlton of the 1st Brigade Combat Team in the Al Anbar Province suggests that relationships are imperative to the success in defeating insurgents.⁶ He amplifies the importance of relationships by making the following statement:

The success we experienced here could not have been achieved without the close personal relationship we developed with the tribal leaders... if the sheikhs step forward and if they tell their young men to join the Iraqi police and the Iraqi Army, you can bet that it's going to happen.⁷

This example of the commitment between tribal leaders and the US military exemplifies how establishing productive relationships through local leadership can have the power to influence an entire community in order to build a more positive culture.

The City of Los Angeles is no stranger to gang activity and is often referred to as "the gang capital of the country if not the world."⁸ The mayor's administration and Los Angeles police department would see a drastic reduction in gang related crime if they work to establish better relationships with communities

by changing their approach to governance. Solomon Moore in a Justice Policy article states the following:

The problem is that when the police focus on gangs rather than the crimes they commit, they are apt to sweep up innocent bystanders, who may dress like a gang member, talk like a gang member and even live in a gang neighborhood, but are not gang members.⁹

Solomon demonstrates how police are using unfair tactics to arrest gang members and innocent bystanders who have not committed any crimes. It suggests that the lack of trust between the police and the public is increasing due to stereotyping.

Mayors, who use governance to build relationships, should mimic Col Charlton and develop relationships with local pastors, community leaders, and businesses to reach out to gangs and to create a common ground for establishing relationships. Charlton mentioned the positive effects of working with other programs in a combined effort to improve community security. He stated:

We've joined our efforts with organizations like the Iraqi- American Chamber of Commerce & Industry to help revitalize small businesses in Ramadi. Company commanders went throughout every neighborhood and conducted assessments of all small businesses in Ramadi, so we could help jumpstart the small business grant program. We collected over 500 assessments, which helped the Iraqi American Chamber of Commerce begin its grant operations... This is the same technique that we use with all non-military organizations. We use our presence in the city and our access to the population to facilitate their operations. Revitalizing small businesses in Ramadi

will lead to more stable communities, which helps us maintain overall security in the area.¹⁰

Community programs and small business grants are also paramount in establishing community relationships through economic growth. Business grants and loans jump start the local economy and provides a sense of security in the community. Col. Charlton witnessed that over time trust was built with the Iraqi people and moral improved over time.

City Programs

Establishing city programs is another successful counter insurgency technique that should be implemented to defeat gangs in major U.S. cities. In Ramadi, military forces established a day labor program, built schools, and provided health care to address the grievances of the Muslim communities.¹¹

In the U.S., "schools, medical care and job opportunities" are noted as the foundations to a healthy productive society.¹²

These programs do exist in gang labeled cities; however, the taxes taken from lower income communities are not enough to provide the financial support needed to help economic growth in the low income communities.¹³ Improving the existing programs in these communities will assist in building a healthier environment for decreasing gang-related activities which are currently deteriorating the community.

Every community requires social economic programs and services to function effectively. Col Charlton established relationships with the sheiks, which gave the community an avenue to voice its grievances and in turn improved the economic growth within the city. Once the main grievances were identified, basic services were established to address those concerns.¹⁴ Col Charlton stated the following:

These day labor programs are all planned and executed by company commanders, and they're effect was just absolutely dramatic... We have a great relationship with other non-governmental organizations operating in the city as well. ..these organizations have also helped us form women's outreach groups that focus on adult literacy, health and education issues.¹⁵

Communities in Iraq are flourishing economically due to a sense of normalcy and pride that economic growth has brought to the city.

U.S. cities plagued by gangs can be converted into productive economic communities if the local governments provide effective city programs. Traditionally, city governments offered only an increase in low paying jobs, such as fast food positions and retail, which do not create enough revenue for improved economic growth. The report entitled, "The Building Blocks of Community Development" states, "Economic development is not just about the creation of jobs. It is the process by which a community or region increases the standard of living of all it's residence."¹⁶ The focus of city effort should be placed

on more permanent solutions that generate enduring economic growth. Jobs that produce higher wages create an environment where citizens can "reinvest" into their neighborhoods, thereby creating a community economy. The taxes from these jobs can then be invested into community service programs, such as schools, hospitals, and social programs that support and educate the community.¹⁷

In Iraq Col. Charlton established work programs that created economic stability throughout the city of Ramadi. These programs were paramount in building community confidence and trust in the US military and local government. He stated the following:

These day labor programs are all planned and executed by company commanders, and they're effect was just absolutely dramatic. . We've provided more than 5.5 million in aid to these programs and employed more than 18,000 Iraqis. . These programs have cleaned neighborhoods, uncovered caches of munitions and have restored hope and pride to the citizens of Ramadi.¹⁸

The economic programs established by Col. Charlton and his staff invigorated Ramadi's economy and created wealth that was then reinvested in the community. The economy brought back local markets, commerce and a sense of security within communities.

The local government of Los Angelos is currently not doing enough economically to jumpstart the economy within its lower income communities. According to a Justice Policy Institute

report, the city has spent Billions on defeating gangs. The article states the following:

City and state officials have spent billions of dollars on policing and surveillance, on development of databases containing the names of tens of thousands of alleged gang members, and on long prison sentences for gang members. Spending on gang enforcement has far outpaced spending on prevention programs or on improved conditions in communities where gang violence takes a heavy toll.¹⁹

This quote suggests that the local government of Los Angeles view law enforcement as the primary means to defeat gangs. Other organizations and programs are not receiving the funding necessary to begin economic growth necessary to start the community growth.

Protection of the population

Protection of the population is the most important technique that can be used by local governments to defeat gangs in U.S. cities. All other techniques are dependent upon the government's ability to provide physical protection against harm or intimidation in a community. In addition, every action taken by police and other organizations must be centered toward the goal of improving the community.

When protecting the population, the police force, youth workers, church and school personnel must be professionally trained to handle problem youth as professionals and with the respect of the community in mind. This task requires each

member of the team to be properly trained and well versed in the goals the local government has set for the community.²⁰

In Iraq, coalition forces cooperated with other "non governmental organizations" Iraqi soldiers, and police to form a joint team to address specific social economic problems in the city of Ramadi. The training they received from the coalition forces coupled with their personal identity with the community, allowed them to identify insurgents immediately and address community concerns. This model of protecting the public was effective and was replicated throughout many cities in Iraq.²¹

The city of Los Angeles has on a number of occasions made national headlines for the mishandling of gangs and illegal immigrants. Gabriel Morales a youth gang counselor believes "Los Angeles city government waited too late in addressing gang violence." When they reacted, they used a heavy-handed approach to police gangs, which netted a large number of arrests but alienated the community in the process.²² He stated the following in an article:

The problem is they didn't do enough early on. They let it get too bad; they let it get out of control. I just hope we never get like that in Seattle... All of us in law enforcement would agree that it has to be more than beating people over the head with the law and putting them in jail.²³

This quote suggests that past and current methods of gang enforcement are not working. The local government and police

department would benefit from taking a team-oriented approach to training by working with other organizations to reduce gang activity in the city. Organizations such as schools, community, youth counselors and church volunteers can be a wealth of knowledge in identifying at-risk teens who may be members of gangs. Funding these programs would be more beneficial than increasing law enforcement efforts because they address individual gang actions, rather than the entire gang and indirectly targets the community.²⁴

Counterargument

The tactics and techniques used by law enforcement across the U.S. have led to a reduction in the number of gangs and a drastic decrease in gang crime. Law enforcement agencies have reduced gangs by increasing dragnets in gang neighborhoods.

Authors Greene and Pranis suggests in Justice Policy article:

..law enforcement estimates indicate that youth gang membership fell from 850,000 in 1996 to 726,000 in 2004 and that the proportion of jurisdictions reporting gang problems have dropped substantially.²⁵

While law enforcement may be reducing gang crime across the country, it is doing so at the detriment of community relationships. Authors Greene and Pranis also suggest, "Gang injunctions, gang sweeps, and ominous-sounding enforcement initiatives reinforce negative images of whole communities and run counter to the positive youth development agenda that

has been proven to work."²⁶ These heavy-handed tactics used by the police only segregate the community as teens are given police records and no hope of improving their surroundings. Programs that tackle the root of gang violence have worked in states that use them in conjunction with other programs.

Conclusion

City governments have found limited success in their current methods of defeating gangs. Some use tough tactics to net high arrest rates, which is performed at the detriment of the community's trust and loyalty. Law enforcement agencies around the country are taking a different approach, such as offering community programs to improve community relations to defeat gangs. These programs have shown limited success. In Iraq, however, there are other techniques that have proved successful. Commanders are using techniques, such as the development of community relationships, the establishment of city programs to better the community, and the protection of the population from intimidation and violence. This holistic approach to defeating insurgents is working in Iraq and can work for law enforcement in American cities. The approach encourages community development while preventing gang behavior of individuals.

Notes

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