



THE FUTURE OF POLICING

Rupert Godesen explains how the police might benefit from help from a private and more localised force

Tuesday the 27 February and I am sitting at my desk pondering a way to start my article on the future of public policing. I take a quick look at the BBC News website and there is my start point. Chief Constable Sara Thornton has been commenting on the interview by the Met Assistant Commissioner Mark Rowley that basically the UK Police can't cope with terror and crime at the same time at

current levels. Incidents are up, money is down and continuing to go down, not a comfortable calculation or statement to make. Every function of Government is taking crippling cuts, and services are failing around us. How are the police expected to deal with an uptick in terrorism on a reducing pot of money?

I would like to take you back very briefly if I may to 11 September, 2001. I was at work when the Twin

A privately funded police service would have smaller, more localised concerns

Towers came down, sitting at my desk completely unaware with my headphones on, happily working away in my own little bubble. I looked up from my computer and the place was deserted, I made myself a brew and went looking. People in small clusters staring at radios open mouthed, brushed my questions aside, trying to listen. Bin Laden and his gang had bought down the Twin Towers, and that day ushered in a new fear that seems to permeate our lives still on many levels.

TIME FOR CHANGE

Since that dreadful event and the increasingly sickening events that followed it, we have become accustomed to seeing horrors on our TV, entire countries are ablaze and emptying, hundreds drown escaping the horror. A growing realisation has been dawning on those in power that there needs to be a rethink to the way we police the land.

In 1837 Robert Peel created the police force in London, which was "of the people and for the people." Designed to be a cohesive force that would professionalise protection for the people of London and greatly improve safety in those dark, foggy streets. Since its inception we have become so accustomed to the idea of placing our faith in a single agency as the guardians of our safety, that nowadays we couldn't conceive of an alternative. Private police forces are the preserve of immensely wealthy gated communities

THE PRIVATE POLICE OR SECURITY GUARD WILL HAVE A MUCH MORE NARROWLY FOCUSED JOB

surely, there's no place for them in Boscombe or Oban?

But before Robert Peel founded the public police, safety and security was organised by villages and districts, comprised of volunteers who were called on to do their bit. There were appointed officials known as Shire Reeves (where the word sheriff is derived from) who would co-ordinate and oversee matters, but by and large it was a volunteer force that stood up to the trouble makers and patrolled the streets.

TAKING BACK CONTROL

Close to where I live there's a neglected part of town that the local council seem to have forsaken. One Saturday I was in a newsagent's. As I bought my newspaper, the guy serving said: "Excuse me a moment sir" and calmly reached for a walkie talkie on the counter. Lifting it to his mouth he calmly spoke into the handset: "Hey everyone, Ron has just passed my shop and is heading for the fountain".

Ron, I later discovered, was a local shoplifter who was usually an hour away with his pockets full of booty, by the time the police arrived to take a statement, shrug and say, "Nothing we can do sadly". The shop owners decided they'd had enough and opted to club together and do something about it.

They got together, about 10 shops and cafes, bought walkie talkies and came up with a bespoke solution to deal with him and others like him. The larger chain shops that could afford a security guard allowed their guys to visit the smaller stores, so that they all

benefited from the umbrella. I remember thinking what a great idea it was, rather than just grumbling about the police and how they weren't getting value for their taxes they'd found a simple solution by clubbing together. Most thieves, fraudsters and their ilk will just keep stealing if they don't think they're going to get caught, which clearly Ron thought would go on indefinitely. It was this that made me realise that the relationship between public police (cops/bobbies on the beat) and private police is going to evolve into something more permanent.

Currently a public police officer on the beat must deal with a bewildering array of incidents, call outs, disturbances and people in any given day. There is a good amount of pressure from the media and high public expectations not to put a foot wrong in a wide variety of different situations. And at all times to carry yourself properly and courteously in the face of what sometimes must be frightening abuse from an unhelpful public.

INCREASED RESPONSIBILITY

They must be a competent generalist that has their finger on the pulse in terms of the rules and regulations of the law and, of course, the characters, shop keepers and common problems in their neighbourhood. The addition of body cameras to provide evidence for prosecutions and body armour to protect themselves from fundamentalists and crazies of all stripes must weigh heavily, especially on the younger members of the force.

Then there's the paperwork, and not forgetting the politically correct minefields in what seems to be still a very masculine organisation with lots of banter to deal with the stress. It is a lengthy process to get into the police service and most ex-policemen that I know would not chose to do it now, which doesn't help with recruitment and retention. Add to this the additional burden as a public force of dealing with terrorism, and it starts to look like an almost impossible weight to bear.

Compared with the street cop or bobby on the beat, the private security guard or private policeman will have a much more narrowly focussed job description and smaller range of potential incidents to deal with on a day-to-day basis. Their patch will most likely consist of one or two buildings and they will have the opportunity to become intimately familiar with their area, which means they're more likely to notice the smallest changes.

They'll be able get to know the rhythm of the area, the local trouble makers (what time they appear) and be able to suggest ways in which to improve things or deal with them or even help them. They'll also hopefully build a level of trust with other staff at their place of work, who will in turn be able to voice concerns to them.

They'll have an area to patrol, so if they see a broken window they can investigate it straight away and see off the youths that did it or call work services that can fix it. There will be a limited range of things that can happen at a static location, which will mean that their response time will be quick and effective as they are already on the scene.

Private police can be recruited and trained, given their arcs of responsibility within a short space of

time and be out there protecting their employers' patch in a fairly short time. If they aren't great at their jobs or show little aptitude they can be let go.

In some parts of the US ex-policemen are involved in these initiatives and are fostering greater links with the public police. Current public police are involved in training their private counterparts and are even endowing them with limited legal powers of arrest and detention until a cop can arrive. Despite the obvious cynicism about "hobby bobbies" forces in the US are seeing the benefit in a noticeable reduction in crime, which means the public are happier as are the public force.

LENDING A HAND

Not long after the Paris Terror attacks, the French army were on the streets in force. I thought at the time it was an odd thing to do because the terrorists were very unlikely to do it again in the face of Legionnaires armed to the teeth. But then the penny dropped, the army were on the streets to let everyone in France know that the state had their backs, and to let the criminals know that they were still being

watched. More importantly, it allowed the gendarmes the time and space (not distracted by the routine business of preserving order) to pull all the stops out to do some good old-fashioned police work to catch the perpetrators and bring them to justice.

With limited funds to share around and potentially a whopping great bill from Brexit I don't think we'll be going back to the days of Shire Reeves and policing

HOW ARE THE POLICE EXPECTED TO DEAL WITH A RISE IN TERRORISM WITH REDUCED FUNDS?

our own streets. But I do think the wind of change is blowing in such a way that as the threat from international and home-grown terror increases, there will be more and more private policing arrangements to ease the burden on an overburdened public police that cannot preserve order on our streets and combat terrorism without help ●

Rupert Godesen

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In the aftermath of the Paris attacks the public needed to feel safe

