

Policing the Future

Law Enforcement's New Challenges

By Gene Stephens

© PHOTODISC INC.



What role will the police play in the future: keepers of the peace, anti-terrorism specialists, or community outreach agents? A noted criminal-justice futurist surveyed police experts to find out. They concluded that better-educated police officers with improved people skills and a stronger grasp on emerging technologies will be crucial to successful policing in the future.

When public policing was first formally instituted in London in 1829, the emphasis was on preventing crime: The public and officers themselves regarded successful policing as the “absence of crime.” The first U.S. police were also “peace officers”; however, a distinctly American style of policing began to emerge in the United States following the end of the Civil War. As settlers populated the West, they found

NASA's Video Image Stabilization and Registration (VISAR) software

may help law-enforcement agencies catch criminals by improving the quality of video recorded at crime scenes. Scientists Paul Meyer (left) and David Hathaway demonstrate how the software stabilizes camera motion horizontally and vertically, producing clearer images of moving objects.

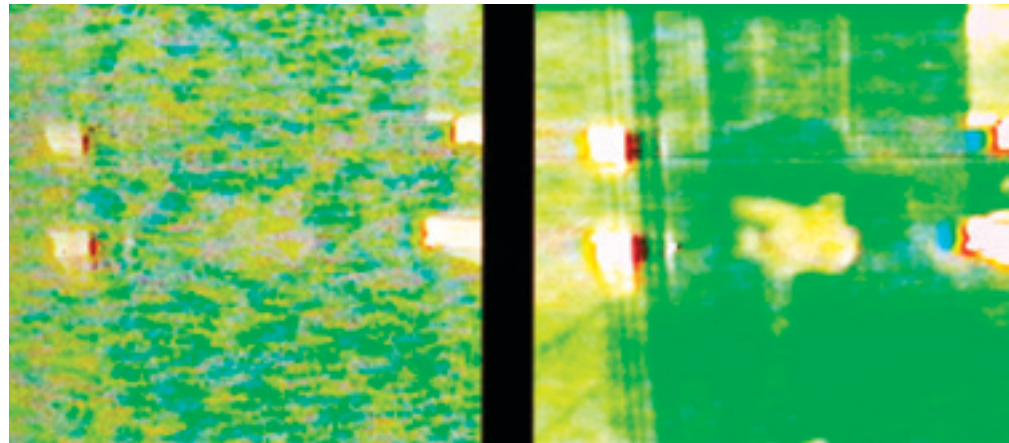


there was no safety unless they provided it. This led to vigilante committees that would pass a set of town laws and often hire a "gun-fighter" as town sheriff in hope of a modicum of protection. In time, the American system replaced preventing crime by keeping the peace with catching and punishing law violators, a "law enforcement" model that prevails and is emulated in many other countries to this day.

Many credit the return to community-oriented policing for the downward trend in street crime that began in 1994. This approach has worked well where it has been implemented, especially when combined with modern research techniques, such as psychological profiling, and technologies, such as high-tech surveillance, to help anticipate and prevent crime.

The twenty-first century has put policing into a whole new milieu—one in which the causes of crime and disorder often lie outside the immediate community, demanding new and innovative approaches from police. Most ordinary street crime involves perpetrators and victims from the same or nearby communities; thus, prevention involves closely watching and analyzing activity in the immediate area and taking action to head off problems (leading to what some call "problem-solving policing"). As street crime has diminished, new and more insidious types of offenses, especially terrorism and Internet-assisted crimes,

have replaced it. Here, offenders are often thousands of miles away while planning and even while committing these crimes. With a rudimentary mastery of modern technology, terrorists from anywhere in the world can bring chemical and biological mayhem to any place on earth. Hackers and crackers halfway around the globe can shut down a chosen community's Internet-



NASA's Video Image Stabilization and Registration software in action. The photo at left was taken at a crime scene at night. VISAR adds information from multiple frames to create a clarified image. Such softwares hold great potential in identifying criminals and preventing crime.

dependent monetary or energy systems. Already, identity theft, often assisted by Internet scams, has become the most prevalent crime in the United States and other developed societies.

Future policing in large part will depend on the type of society being policed—the social, economic, and political realities and, in more-developed countries, the technological so-

ciety being policed—the social, economic, and political realities and, in more-developed countries, the technological so-

phistication of the populace. In countries such as Iraq, police are much like soldiers and will continue to use “combat policing” methods in some areas, while seeking to gain support and help from the public in more secured communities. In theocracies and dictatorships, policing likely will remain dedicated to protecting and serving the needs of those in power.

The Police Futurists International

If anyone in the policing profession has a handle on what lies ahead and how to cope, it is the members of the Society of Police Futurists International (PFI). Based on more than 30 years of experience researching, teaching, and training police, I believe that these indeed are the individuals on the cutting edge in policing.

“PFI brings together the finest minds in policing—practitioners and scholars—to focus on researching ways to better anticipate future issues through the use of scientific methods and application of high technology,” says PFI founder William Tafoya. These are the men and women most likely to understand the road ahead and to be able to predict the threats and promises to expect in the next few years. The police futurists contributing to this article focus on policing in at least partially democratic societies, especially those increasingly dependent on high-tech communication and service delivery—a situation that likely will eventually include most of the world. To glean their insights on the future of policing, I queried PFI members via interviews, a structured questionnaire, and the PFI Listserv.

Policing has traditionally been a closed, slow-to-change subculture. Even the most optimistic future-oriented thinkers in the field find it difficult to imagine how police will be able to cope with the emerging complexity of combating terrorism and Internet crime while simultaneously keeping a lid on conventional street crime and creating cohesive neighborhoods. Yet no one on the panel was willing to say that doing both just couldn’t be done. Most agreed

that success is possible if new personnel come from better-educated applicants who are then better trained and mentored to fit into a reorganized structure designed to meet the new roles and demands of policing. That is a tall order, as today more than 90% of police agencies in

the United States require only a high-school diploma or equivalent to qualify for employment; increasingly, however, applicants have done at least some college work.

Current police training in the United States (usually three or four months plus a probationary period

Panelists



Alan Beckley



Eugene Hernandez



Tyree Blocker



Bernard Levin



Jim Conser



Judith Lewis



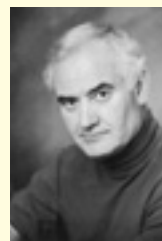
Tom Cowper



Gary Sykes



Steve Hennessy



William Tafoya

- **Alan Beckley**, chief inspector (retired), West Mercia Constabulary, United Kingdom; past president, PFI.
- **Maj. Tyree Blocker**, Pennsylvania State Police; past president, PFI.
- **Capt. Gordon Bowers**, Burbank, California, Police Department.
- **Jim Conser**, criminal justice professor, Youngstown State University; secretary, PFI.
- **Tom Cowper**, state police inspector; treasurer, PFI.
- **Joe Grebmeier**, chief, Greenfield, California, Police Department.
- **Kenneth Hailey**, manager of planning and research, St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department.
- **Steve Hennessy**, associate professor, St. Cloud State University; president, PFI; former police-training administrator, Phoenix.
- **Eugene Hernandez**, chief, Chino, California, Police Department; past president, PFI.
- **Bernard “Bud” Levin**, director, Waynesboro, Virginia, Police Research and Development Division; head, Social Sciences Department, Blue Ridge Community College; research director, PFI.
- **Judith Lewis**, captain (retired), Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department; past president, PFI.
- **Gary Sykes**, director, Institute for Law Enforcement Administration, Plano, Texas.
- **William Tafoya**, criminologist, retired FBI agent, and founder, PFI.



This single operator powered-lift vehicle supports operator/pilot in a standing position. Developed by Trek Aerospace, this vehicle may soon be used by law-enforcement and emergency responders for search-and-rescue, traffic enforcement, and surveillance.

organizationally to support the cooperation needed, and its officers don't have the training and technology to do the job. So my view is that, currently, traditional law enforcement is being left behind.

William Tafoya: With the exception of better-educated personnel and the use of technology, little has changed in the past 50 years with regard to the role of policing.

Jim Conser: Societal expectations are changing, and policing has some difficulties keeping up with the services that society re-

quires. In some communities, the disconnect is quite serious; in others, the police are very professional and serve their communities well. But policing is still a local community activity, and there are great discrepancies in levels of service across the United States.

Changes in the Next Five Years

The biggest issues affecting most aspects of both near-term and long-term policing trends involve technology and funding. Many of the PFI respondents agree that technologies will revolutionize the use of force and tactics, but how those technologies will be paid for remains to be seen. When asked about the next five years, the panel had this to say about what to expect.

Tom Cowper: Exponential technological advancements will continue to increase social vulnerability and fear, give terrorists and criminals new methods and opportunities, and give police new tools to stop them. Privacy issues will constrain the abil-

CHRIS YOUNG / AFP / GETTY IMAGES



U.K. Prime Minister Tony Blair has his thumbprint taken during a law-enforcement trial using biometrics. Biometrics uses facial identity, iris recognition, and fingerprints for identification. The information will be used to help passport authentication and prevent identity fraud.

on the job) remains committed to the basics of combat policing—self-defense, firing range, field tactics—with little time left for the skills needed for preventing crime and improving community services and relationships. Most PFI respondents agreed more education and more and refocused training will be necessary to cope with emerging international and high-tech crime and disorder. Here's what they had to say.

Recent Changes in Policing

The participating Police Futurists generally agreed that local law enforcement is taking a back seat to pressures from homeland security and similar non-neighborhood or off-site threats.

Judith Lewis: The expectations of law enforcement as first responder for homeland security have put an almost unachievable burden on local law enforcement, as has the explosion of crimes like identity theft. Local law enforcement is not designed

ity of police to employ many new technologies to control crime and terrorism, forcing police to deal with ever more complex issues and situations with outmoded tools and processes.

Kenneth Hailey: We can expect smaller budgets and higher expectations. We will get communities to take charge of their own destinies; however, the labor-intensive, small, personal beats required to maintain neighborhoods will be expensive. Police departments will be run on more of a business, problem-solving model than a paramilitary model.

Tyree Blocker: Public policing will be customized to the individual in the near future. Policing style may differ from neighborhood to neighborhood, depending on the threats to and needs of different citizens.

Bud Levin: I see a need for linkages with military and the international scene—boundaryless policing. Cooperation of police at all levels along with coordination with other agencies will be necessary to cope with crime that is increasingly cross-jurisdictional—Internet offenses and terrorism, for example.

Joe Grebmeier: People will want more answers and results from us while budgets and resources will remain scarce. Organized street gangs will grow and become more dangerous.

Police and the War on Terrorism

A Canadian police administrator (who preferred to remain anonymous) summarized the consensus of the group regarding the role of police and the war on terrorism as “protecting the community, emergency response as may be required, effective intelligence gathering and sharing.” Most respondents, however, were concerned that funding for meeting this mission might not be forthcoming.

Lewis: Local police are the first responders and the best hope of prevention. They need to be reorganized, trained, and funded to meet this need.

Conser: Local police need to learn who is in their community and what goes on there. They need to be the neighborhood constable whom

everyone respects and shares information with. Local police need to work with their state and federal counterparts, but make sure that local citizens’ concerns are treated fairly.

Steve Hennessy: Patrol officers should be trained in noticing minor anomalies in behavior of people they come in contact with during their primary role of monitoring public safety and keeping the peace.

New Technologies

Several respondents noted technology is like a double-edged sword—it will continue to create new crimes even as it assists crime fighters. Among the technologies mentioned were biometrics to assist in positive identification; nonlethal weapons to provide an option to deadly force; digital documentation of everything officers see, say, and do; a virtual cashless society to reduce robbery rates; intelligent vehicles to reduce accidents; and networked clothing and equipment for easier, speedier locating.

Lewis: If someone figures out that we need to invest in homeland security, and if financial institutions figure out that they can’t afford the losses to identity theft and other sophisticated crimes and need the help of law enforcement, then with funding they can get the technology needed.

Conser: Local economies cannot support the new technologies over the long term; there will have to be additional federal and state funding. However, local communities will discover that some personnel are not capable of using modern technology and that an investment in training and education will be required.

Cowper: Technology will create a rapidly changing social environment to which police will have to adapt. At the same time, technology will permit radical new policing methods, systems, and processes that police will have to envision, create, incorporate, and learn. Technology will also create new opportunities for criminals and terrorists to prey on the innocent and exploit society’s vulnerabilities. Technology will also allow fewer people to do much

greater damage, driving an increased public demand for security; this will in turn impact privacy and civil liberties, exacerbating tensions between the police and the community.

Hailey: Tactically, many items of equipment being tested on the military battlefield today will find their way into American policing in the near future (e.g., surveillance via global positioning satellites and unmanned aerial drones). There appear to be technologies that will improve officer safety, such as better and faster communication in the field and improved identification and tracking procedures so the officer knows who he really has in custody and the location of the person or vehicles he’s seeking. The less-than-lethal-force initiatives will get much more attention.

Safety vs. Civil Liberties

A majority of respondents believe it is possible to increase surveillance and add high-tech spyware to better protect homeland security without interfering greatly with personal liberty. However, a significant minority wasn’t so sure. All agreed, however, that vigilance on the part of both police and citizenry will be necessary to protect safety and rights absolutely. Said one Canadian respondent, “Accountability, professionalism, and ethics within an organization go a long way to help achieve this.”

Alan Beckley: Citizens must accept that higher levels of security must result in reduced civil liberties.

Gary Sykes: There will have to be extensive accountability from police management and the courts if rights are to be protected.

Hailey: New technologies should add to public safety, but we may have to let go of a few civil liberties to get the maximum effect. It is all going to depend on the priorities of the people. What do they want, and how far do they want to go to get it?

Grebmeier: It will be a struggle. We must remain dedicated to protecting the Constitution.

Conser: Where civil liberties seem to be an issue, it is often because the police are not trusted or have a less-than-stellar track record in upholding

Groups Dedicated to the Future of Policing

The Society of Police Futurists International (PFI) was officially constituted in August 1991. Its mission is “to foster excellence in policing by promoting and applying the discipline of Futures Research.” Among its goals are:

- Establishing partnerships among law enforcement, the academic community, and the private sector.
- Sharing knowledge, information, and data among those partners.
- Developing long-range forecasts for trends affecting law enforcement and for law enforcement impacts on society.
- Serving as a clearinghouse for communicating creative, innovative, and proactive policing strategies.

PFI holds its annual meeting jointly with the World Future Society, where PFI offers several panels on law enforcement/criminal justice topics on the WFS program. PFI also provides an online newsletter and a Listserv for members. Asked what the role of PFI should be in the future, PFI founder William Tafoya said, “To serve as a clearinghouse for research and as a vanguard to inform the public about innovations in policing.”

For more information, visit the PFI Web site, www.policefuturists.org.

The **FBI National Academy**, founded in 1935, provides leadership and specialized training. The Academy uses a stringent selection process to choose top and mid-level agency managers from

departments across the United States and, since 1962, from more than 150 other countries.

In 1999, FBI Supervisory Agent Carl Jensen reintroduced the futuristics course at the National Academy and, in 2000, coordinated a conference on futuristics and law enforcement. As a result of this conference and the tragedy of September 11, 2001, the FBI collaborated with PFI to create a joint **Futures Working Group (FWG)** to help law enforcement deal with issues that will confront them in the near future.

The FWG, created in 2002, strives to “identify and promote innovation for the future of policing” by developing and promoting the use of forecasts and strategies to “ethically maximize the effectiveness of local, state, federal, and international law enforcement bodies as they strive to maintain peace.”

Among FWG’s early projects was a study of police and augmented-reality technology by PFI members Thomas Cowper (a state police inspector) and Michael Buerger of Bowling Green State University. The two dozen members of the group are also working on a national intelligence model, strategic-thinking training for the FBI’s College of Analytical Studies, futures research training for the FBI Virtual Academy, a project on policing’s vanishing boundaries, and a “best practices” in policing project, among others. Details: www.fbi.gov/hq/td/fwg/workhome.htm.—Gene Stephens

the trust of the people when it comes to protecting constitutional rights.

Eugene Hernandez: To balance safety and liberty, the citizenry will need to show greater flexibility and patience than has ever been exhibited in the past.

Cowper: One key is to dramatically improve the way police do business. Networked organizational

models that radically improve information flow, reduce centralized decision making, and increase the speed and efficiency of police operations are essential to providing both safety and liberty.

Hailey: Police might follow the lead of the courts, which continue to shift from the “individual rights” era to the “greater good” era and look at

what is beneficial for the greater good and sustenance of America.

The Promises of the Future

Better technology, better educated and trained officers and leaders, and better community ties were seen by most as the significant promises in the future of policing. One respondent added increased diversity, awareness, and knowledge, as well as increased information and knowledge sharing and communication, to the list.

Conser: I see positive and true leaders in the field who practice and demand professionalism, who challenge their officers to be the best, and who have an open, honest dialogue with their communities as being among the most significant highlights for the future of policing.

Cowper: I see an increased willingness of police agencies to work together, communicate, and share information across jurisdictions and levels of government.

Hernandez: Greater partnerships with the community, enhanced technology, and ethical, educated employees hold the most significant promise for policing’s future.

Levin: Someday, we may learn to give up power in order to build relationships in our community, to see ourselves as professional service providers—and hire low-paid line workers to carry out the garbage (i.e., to conduct “combat policing”).

Threats in Policing’s Future

The possibility that police will not be able to keep up with rapid change—terrorism, cybercrime, technology—was seen as the most serious threat, followed by the fear that higher priority for homeland security will result in the police becoming a serious threat to civil liberties. Another potential danger: misuse of power and abuse of authority by the men and women in charge. Policing, furthermore, has long been a “closed society” to outsiders, the so-called “blue brotherhood.” Many of the threats mentioned by the respondents stem from the long-standing ability of police to operate independently and without

close public scrutiny, a situation that is rapidly changing in this transparent information age.

Tafoya: Unqualified leadership—lacking vision or a sense of public service—poses the greatest threat to police. The greatest threat to the public is police enforcing the law and providing service that is directed by unqualified or underqualified leaders.

Bowers: Misuse of power and feelings of entitlement are likely to accompany any increases in authority.

Sykes: Aggressive policing and racial profiling could undermine the public's trust more than at present.

Hernandez: I see increased community pressure to return to a warrior officer who suppresses, through legal mandate, more civil liberties in response to homeland security.

Conser: There are not enough positive and true leaders to make sweeping changes to the field. Some other threats include:

- Terrorist tactics being used by domestic criminals (e.g., sophisticated gangs and/or drug operations) to divert police resources and keep populations insecure. The result could be vigilantism.

- Federalization of policing efforts in terms of policy, funding, direction, and control.

- Entangling alliances with private-sector corporations wherein there is no accountability for abuses that occur.

- Not looking to policing models and standards in other countries for innovations and possible alternatives (e.g., nations that have been dealing with terrorism for a long time, such as England, Ireland, France, and Israel, and countries whose police forces have higher entrance and training standards).

Final Words from the Panelists

Lewis: Police must gain a grasp on emerging high-tech crime if they are to fulfill their sworn duty of protecting and serving the public. I once overheard a work-release prisoner discussing with a park worker at the beach how one went about stealing a person's identity. This is a new cottage industry that police don't investigate.

Cowper: Twentieth-century solu-

tions executed with twentieth-century speed will not solve twenty-first-century problems.

Grebmeier: Every U.S. law enforcement officer takes an oath to defend and protect the Constitution. We cannot allow public fear or political pressure to sway us from our original oath. We exist to protect the rights of the public. We are the first line of defense in protection of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. Our role is to provide leadership, direction, and set the standard, both professionally and ethically.

From Warrior Cops To Community Builders

PFI members expressed cautious optimism about the potential for defining and fulfilling an effective mission for policing in the future.

The paramilitary, combat model dominating policing around the world for more than a century will likely continue to prevail in nations ruled by dictators or military force. In democratic countries, however, a consensus model based at the community level will slowly replace this approach to "fighting" crime, and this is the model that will prevail in policing within the next few years. Combat will still be necessary occasionally to root out terrorists and violent gang activity, but even here police-community partnerships to proactively prevent such activity have begun to replace military tactics.

One major change will be refinement of the new model, already begun with the New York City Police Department's COMSTAT (computer comparison statistics) program. COMSTAT has been so successful in reducing street crime and violence that it is being adopted by police agencies across the United States and beyond. St. Louis police researcher and PFI member Kenneth Hailey described the process as "communicate, cooperate, gather information, share information, investigate relentlessly, and follow up." The four major goals established for COMSTAT are accurate and timely intelligence, effective tactics, rapid deployment of personnel and resources, and relentless follow-up and assessment.

The top cops admit that even this will not be enough to cope with the complex, high-tech information age. Bioterrorism, identity theft, cyberstalking, and crimes not yet defined will require more intelligent, better educated and trained, and more tech-savvy officers and leaders than are now available in policing. Today a large majority of agencies require only a high-school diploma or equivalency to begin a career in policing. Training usually consists of 12 to 16 weeks of academy work and a six-month probationary period, during which superiors evaluate the new officer. A few departments have specialists coping with Internet crime, but most do not. Leadership and management courses are offered for some, but coping with emerging technology and transnational crime and disorder has just begun to be part of the training.

Police need a new structure that fosters teamwork and cooperation with other agencies and community groups—where police in some cases must give up some of their power and become subsidiaries in a larger operation. The "cowboy" officers drawn to policing to shoot guns, bark orders, and "kick butt" are unlikely to accept the new role or be competent to fill it.

The twenty-first-century police candidate, thus, must be carefully chosen and then trained and mentored to fill the role of modern policing. Only then will policing become a true profession; and only then will police be able to deliver on their mission to protect and serve the citizenry. □



About the Author

Gene Stephens, criminal justice editor of THE FUTURIST, is a distinguished professor emeritus of the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of South Carolina.

His address is 313 Lockner Court, Columbia, South Carolina 29212. E-mail stephens-gene@sc.rr.com. His last article for THE FUTURIST was "Global Trends in Crime" (May-June 2003).

FEEDBACK: Send your comments about this article to letters@wfs.org.