

Counterinsurgency Strategy—

**A Path to
Effective
Policing**

HOWARD RAHTZ

COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY – A PATH TO EFFECTIVE POLICING

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After service as a Peace Corps Volunteer, a Parole Officer, a Methadone Clinic Counseling Supervisor, and 10 years as CEO of the Alcoholism Council of Cincinnati, Howard joined the Cincinnati Police Department. He rose quickly through the ranks, serving as an initial supervisor in the department's community policing effort, and then as commander of the department's Police Academy. He was selected as one of the first negotiators for the newly formed SWAT Crisis Negotiation Team and later served as coordinator for that unit. He retired as commander of the department's Vice Squad.

Howard is the author of several books on police issues, including *Understanding Police Use of Force* and *Race, Riots and the Police*. Howard holds a master's degree in counseling from the University of Cincinnati.

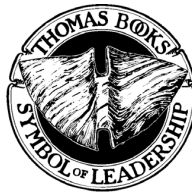
He lives with his wife Kathy in Cincinnati, enjoying his extended family including three granddaughters.

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By

HOWARD RAHTZ

With a Foreword by Richard S. Biehl



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*This book is dedicated to my family,
My wife Kathy, who also serves as my IT director
My wonderful daughters, Caroline and Christine, and
Their partners, Rob and Mike
My daughter-in-law Sherry and our three wonderful granddaughters
Penny, Cecilia, and Daphne
And for Denny: We miss you.*

FOREWORD

I first met Howard Rahtz in early 1988. As a newly promoted police lieutenant for the Cincinnati Police Department, I was tasked with implementing the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program within the police agency and Cincinnati community. As a part of this endeavor, I reached out to many stakeholders who had a role in the prevention of substance use disorder and addiction. It was within that pursuit that I reached out to the Alcoholism Council of Cincinnati, and its Executive Director, Howard Rahtz.

Later that year, Howard joined the Cincinnati Police Department. His unique background as a former Peace Corps volunteer and addictions treatment professional, combined with his mature age of 42, provided a unique perspective on community problems.

As with many worthwhile endeavors, a incubation is needed for substantial insight and clear direction to emerge. Thus, his book *Community Policing: A Handbook for Beat Cops and Supervisors*, published on May 1, 2001, was his first contribution to policing.

In this writing, he discussed the national burgeoning trend of Community Policing, the local implementation of which was the direct result of efforts by members of the Cincinnati Police Department. This effort grew and matured over the following decade. It is important to note that this police innovation was a direct outcome of a crisis of police legitimacy in U.S. policing practices dating to the 1960s. The timing of publishing *Community Policing: A Handbook for Beat Cops and Supervisors* was ironic in two respects. It was published less than one month after civil unrest and rioting befell the Cincinnati community in early April 2001. The disorder followed the unintentional fatal shooting by a Cincinnati police officer of an unarmed African American male. It was a tragedy that underscored the poisonous effect of some use-of-force incidents, with, at times, horrific and irrevocable outcomes, derailing community policing efforts and striking a devastating blow to the legitimacy upon which police effectiveness depends.

Secondly, this first book was published a little more than four months before the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001. The soul-wrenching loss of nearly three thousand American lives spawned the “war on terror” and military operations in

Afghanistan and Iraq. It was in this complex and violent environment of combat operations where Counterinsurgency Strategy (COIN) and its foundational elements, including key aspects of community policing, were severely tested. Thus, it is fitting that this current work connects the two worlds of community policing and military counterinsurgency strategy from their roots more than 20 years ago to address the contemporary policing crises of our times.

One of the central points of this present work is the centrality of legitimacy to community policing and counterinsurgency strategy. Swings positive or negative in legitimacy will influence public safety, whether in civilian environments or military counterinsurgency control areas. In essence, legitimacy is needed for both effective community policing and effective counterinsurgency.

Adequate security in policed communities or military-patrolled threat areas is the first test of safety forces. The significance of this cannot be overstated. Where security struggles, crime and disorder spread. Yet safety tactics, whether police or military, if heavy-handed or coercive, may produce short-term improvement in community security but will fail long-term when community cooperation and involvement erode due to the declining legitimacy of public safety or military personnel—a classic case of winning a minor victory but failing in the greater mission.

Thus, what delegitimizes public safety personnel and their organizations – unwarranted use of force, unconstitutional policing, public corruption, and law violations by police personnel – often have immediate and persistent adverse effects on public safety. This current work pulls no punches in this regard by providing ample and compelling examples of organizational and leadership failures, both recent and historical, to graphically illustrate their damaging effects.

Yet, in highlighting what is, for some, an unlikely source (military operations) of inspiration to correct the erosion of confidence in the police, this volume's in-depth exploration of COIN and its application to contemporary policing provides needed illumination.

A sobering tone is struck regarding the necessary components of COIN for it to be effective in increasing both legitimacy of police and improved public safety. COIN is unlikely to be transformative without comparable implementation within governmental structures beyond police agencies. Police leadership, and governmental leadership generally, will require more robust knowledge, skills, and abilities to augment the effectiveness of COIN with the integration of broader community and governmental resources to address environmental factors that contribute to crime and disorder. An essential element is the engagement of members of the public as key partners in all aspects of planning and implementation of COIN. These and other topics pertinent to the successful implementation of COIN are discussed in-depth and with thorough analyses in this volume.

COIN is not offered as a panacea and there are limited examples of its implementation in policing in the United States. Yet, it would be a failure of

leadership and public safety stewardship to ignore Howard Rahtz's thoughtful elaboration and examination of COIN's potential to transform crime-ridden areas often found in urban areas, to vitally recover lost legitimacy by police agencies across America, and essentially remedy what ails policing efforts in America.

Richard S. Biehl
Police Chief (Ret.)
City of Dayton, Ohio

PREFACE

In the first quarter of the 21st century, the United States suffered civil disorder on a scale not seen since the 1960s. Triggers for the disorders were high-profile incidents of police force, most notably, the death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis officers in May of 2020. Protests, some devolving into violence, afflicted over 100 American cities. In some locales, the violence included direct attacks on the police, including the firebombing of station houses.

In the aftermath of the disorder, crime surged. The rule of law in high-crime areas weakened, proactive policing diminished, and law enforcement officers across the country retired and resigned in record numbers. A January 2023 Pew poll found citizen trust in police at historic lows.

As a retired Cincinnati Police Captain, I felt familiarity and frustration as the country struggled to provide public safety and address the trust gap between police and the communities they were serving. Following a police shooting in 2001, Cincinnati experienced civil disorder, and violence in the city escalated over the ensuing years. A widely praised effort, known as the Collaborative Agreement, joined by the city, the Fraternal Order of Police, the ACLU, and the Black United Front, committed the partners to a united effort to close the trust gap and work cooperatively toward public safety. Later research found crime declining as measures of police legitimacy improved.

With an interest in military history, I came across Fred Kaplan's book, *The Insurgents: David Petraeus and the Plot to Change the American Way of War*. As I made my way through Kaplan's work, I was struck by the overlap of the counterinsurgency strategy advocated by David Petraeus and the principles of community policing. With further research, I have come to the belief a counterinsurgency doctrine adapted for policing can close the trust gap and significantly enhance public safety. The goal is neighborhood safety based on police legitimacy, effective security, and a whole-of-government effort to address local community problems.

I hope *Counterinsurgency Strategy: A Path to Effective Policing* can be useful in the discussion as our communities struggle to provide compassionate and efficient policing services.

H. R.

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COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY – A PATH TO EFFECTIVE POLICING

Chapter One

THE ROAD TO EFFECTIVE POLICING

If one looks at long-term planning in police organizations, one will find no concrete police plan in any law enforcement organization in America – nowhere—aimed at ending serious crime.

Crank and Colleagues, in *Mission-Based Policing*¹ (2011)

In the wake of Tyre Nichols' death, the Memphis police have nothing to celebrate and much to improve. The same goes for the United States as a whole.

Washington Post Editorial Board (2023a)

In the first quarter of the 21st century, the United States suffered several civil disturbances dating from Cincinnati in 2001 to the nationwide protests in the aftermath of the George Floyd murder in Minneapolis in 2020. The deaths of Black Americans at the hands of the police fueled demands for reform. The demands for changes in policing covered the waterfront. Some critics blamed the increasing militarization of the police; others pointed to problems in police culture. More training, civilian oversight, better pay, community policing, focusing on the use of force, ending qualified immunity for police, addressing officer wellness, changing police culture, and de-funding the police were all offered as potential remedies.

Using concepts developed as part of the military counterinsurgency doctrine has not been an element in the discussion. Yet, an adaptation of counterinsurgency strategy, or COIN, offers a potential path to police reform with a record of effectiveness in the most trying of circumstances. The COIN strategy relies on the establishment of government legitimacy, a focus on security for the populace, and concerted efforts to improve the social and economic conditions of the population.

COIN strategy has been used worldwide, including Malaysia, Vietnam, Northern Ireland, and most recently, Iraq and Afghanistan. On close examination, many of COIN principles directly correspond to community-oriented policing. The central question is whether COIN strategy, applied in the context of domestic policing, can effectively reduce the crime and disorder afflicting communities in the United States.

Chapter Two introduces the COIN efforts by General David Petraeus in Mosul, Iraq, in 2003 and his later efforts as Commander of the Coalition Forces during the “surge” of American troops in Iraq in 2006. In 2003 and the decade following, military commanders were confronted with an increasingly violent insurgency and a widening trust gap with the Iraqi population. In the United States, increasing crime and disorder problems are similarly characterized by a yawning trust gap between the police and the communities they serve.

Chapter Three describes the basic principles of COIN and notes their specific application to policing. The major premise of COIN is the establishment of legitimacy. Research in American communities has documented the relationship between the view of police as a legitimate authority and the community crime situation.

The militarization of the police is the subject of an ongoing dispute among policymakers. Chapter Four reviews the development of police militarization. The controversy on police militarization is captured in opposing views of the police: one as warriors in the struggle against crime or two as guardians responsible for community safety. The chapter provides the history and context for the movement toward militarization.

COIN strategy and community-oriented policing (COP) share several important characteristics. Chapter Five reviews the development of COP from the innovations of August Vollmer through the pioneering work of “Broken Windows” theorists Keeling and Wilson through the innovations of Herman Goldstein, who introduced problem-solving as a model of effective policing. The paradox of the development of community policing parallel with the increasing militarization of police is explored.

Legitimacy is the foundation for COIN strategy. In the fight against the Iraqi insurgency, General David Petraeus made the importance of legitimacy crystal clear with his admonition to troops, “What have you done to win Iraqi hearts and minds today?” Winning the support of the population is no less important in policing. Chapter Six reviews the role of legitimacy in policing, highlighting the sharp decline in legitimacy

documented in national surveys. Legitimacy is built on the millions of face-to-face interactions between police officers and community members. Steps to enhance police legitimacy are provided, including the use of procedural justice tactics.

The first challenge to police legitimacy is community safety. By 2006, the security situation in Iraq was rapidly deteriorating with an estimated 3000 Iraqis each month being killed in sectarian violence. Coalition military forces were inadequate to meet security demands, and at the recommendation of General Petraeus, an additional 30,000 American soldiers were deployed to respond to the security concerns. Known as the “Surge,” the additional troops provided a level of security that pulled the country back from a looming disaster. Chapter Seven summarizes the learning points from the “Surge” experience, noting that without adequate security, disorder will spread.

The most powerful tool in the federal government’s hands to impose reform on local police departments is the Department of Justice (DOJ) “Patterns and Practices” investigation. These investigations, generally catalyzed by a high-profile police incident, have been utilized nearly 100 times since their legislative creation in 1994. Chapter Eight examines the history of these investigations and briefly reviews research related to their effectiveness.

Chapter Nine begins with a review of the common issues found in the two most recent DOJ investigations, the Louisville Metropolitan Police Department (LMPD) and the Minneapolis Police Department (MPD) investigations. Examining the major problems identified in the context of COIN principles is provided. An organizational strategy based on COIN principles is outlined for effective, constitutionally compliant policing.

The central challenge for police agencies is the trust gap between the police and the people they are sworn to serve. In COIN terms, the degraded legitimacy of the police, particularly in minority neighborhoods, remains a barrier to effective community safety. The trust gap is manifested in research documenting a decreasing willingness to call the police to report crime and historically low levels of violent crime case closure by the police. The lack of effectiveness in solving crime becomes a drag on legitimacy. Chapter Ten reviews the current state of police legitimacy in high-crime areas and makes recommendations to address the issue.

COIN strategy and community policing connect most strongly in the focus on problem-solving. COIN principles call for a “whole of

government” approach to address the “collective security and political, economic, and social development” of the people. In Chapter Eleven, two award-winning and police-led problem-solving efforts are described. The application of COIN principles in these problem-solving efforts is highlighted.

Only a few specifically COIN-inspired policing efforts have been implemented in the United States. In Chapter Twelve, COIN policing efforts in Springfield, Massachusetts, and Salinas, California, are reviewed. Both these efforts originated with military veterans who had experience in COIN operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both efforts included evaluation and provided insight into the potential of COIN strategy in policing operations.

Chapter Thirteen provides a detailed description of the intersection of community policing principles and COIN. Where there is little material relating to COIN strategy in domestic policing, community policing principles have found a supportive audience among military COIN strategists. Some COIN tactics with clear application to policing are listed, and their relationship to the COIN priority of legitimacy is reviewed.

Change in a police department is akin to turning around an aircraft carrier. Moving to a COIN-inspired policing model would require the utmost patience, determination, and leadership. Chapter Fourteen reviews some of the critical issues on the road to COIN-inspired effective policing.

NOTES

1. John P. Crank, Rebecca K. Murray, Dawn M Irlbeck, Mark T. Sundermeier (2011). *Mission-Based Policing*, CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL. The authors also published a journal article by the same title in *Police Practice and Research*, Vol.13, No. 2, in April 2012.

Chapter Two

TROUBLED COMMUNITIES

...before you decide to conduct an initiative, an operation, or a policy, ask whether that policy or initiative will take more bad guys off the streets than it creates by its conduct.

General David Petraeus¹

On May 1, 2003, President George Bush stood on the deck of the USS *Abraham Lincoln* under a large banner reading ‘Mission Accomplished.’ He announced the end of major combat operations in Iraq. Yet, even as American troops entered Bagdad, the seeds of the coming insurgency were emerging as Iraqi militias, operating out of pickup trucks, engaged in armed skirmishes with the American columns. Over the following months, bureaucratic malfeasance, large-scale corruption, and murderous ethnic conflict would all contribute to a fracturing of Iraqi civil society and a deadly insurgency targeting both the provisional Iraqi government and the American military.

As the regime of Saddam Hussein collapsed following the American invasion in 2003, General David Petraeus, then commander of the 101st Airborne Division, was sent to secure Mosul, a city in the north of Iraq. Mosul was the second largest city in Iraq, with a population of 1.7 million. The population was primarily Sunni Muslim but included large numbers of Kurds, Turkmen, Armenians, and other groups.

The 101st arrived in Mosul on April 20, 2003. They found the city in shambles, without water, electricity, or sanitation services. The civil administration of Mosul had crumbled along with the regime in Bagdad. Ministry buildings had been looted, and the resulting vacuum had been filled with ethnic conflict, increasing crime, and civil disorder.

With American soldiers working to provide security, Petraeus acted quickly to locate leaders of the various factions in Mosul. He worked