



Crowd Control

Planning for Civil Disobedience

BY SCOTT WINEC

Every police agency must plan for crowd control and civil disturbance. It does not take a major occurrence like the WTO conference or the Republican National Convention to embroil the agency in a profound event. Consider the myriad of reasons that have precipitated riots in recent history: sporting events, wedding receptions, labor disputes, social gatherings, college campus activities and police action. Even the smallest agency can potentially be faced with an out of control crowd when rival high schools play a championship game. While some

events may be spontaneous, many can be anticipated.

The first task of any agency is to assess the political will. What kind of support does the agency have from the governing body? If tactical action is dictated, will the agency be supported, distanced or publicly criticized? If the political will is an unknown, the time to formally seek support is now, not after the fact. Know where the department stands and incorporate that as a factor in the measured response plan. If the department is not on very firm ground, start a public relations campaign immediately. The ability of officers to act safely will depend on their standing in the political will.

The first component of a campaign to garner the political

will is information. How much does the governing body, and the public in general, understand the intended response? To address some of the frictions common between the police and the community, many police agencies have engaged in an outreach effort. The Portland, OR, Police Bureau initiated a Citizens Academy, a course of instruction that takes citizens through some of the rudimentary skills taught to recruits. When citizens have a greater understanding of what officers are taught, and why they do what they do, some common criticisms are diffused.

Showing selected members of the political body what the officers are trained to do is beneficial for law enforcement. A crucial element includes how the department arrived at the response plan.

If a video is available of other crowd control responses, key leaders can see what others have done or not done. This is helpful for training officers, as well as giving community and governmental leaders a realistic idea of the impact that crowds can have on the livability of the community. Share some of the intended police tactics so the response is not a surprise.

Some community members are shocked when officers deploy wearing helmets. If the department is forthcoming about this piece of equipment and its purpose, criticism can be deflected. If the response plan includes OC pepper spray, sting-ball grenades, less-lethal munitions or other specialized equipment, this forewarning is critical. Television coverage should not be the first time community leaders find out about this kind of police response. Do not, of course, disclose all of the police tactics and contingencies, but an exposure tied to deployment theory could keep the agency out of the political hot spot. The more the public knows about the manner and motive for the police response, the better off the police are.

Since the information on police tactics and equipment is out, have the Public Information Officer update the political leaders and the press about the police training and equipment. Show how the techniques and equipment will enhance public safety, and the safety of non-criminal demonstrators. Explain why the plan is the safest for all involved. Counteract the "no-response-by-police" argument as invalid. Film footage from other demonstrations that turned criminal can bolster the police assertions. The representatives of anarchist groups, and other advocates for unlawful actions, will conduct their own information campaign.

Foster support through openness and a rapid identification of police shortcomings, followed by a plan to correct the problem. In many cases, incorrect responses to crowd control come down to training and leadership issues. Many officers could improve their reaction by being taught how better to react. An organized, well-trained and disciplined squad will seldom cause embarrassment. That also implies the police have adequately trained supervisors with a reasonable span of control. It is frequently independent or unsupervised action that causes the most trouble.

If officers are fatigued, have insufficient sleep, are on the line facing demonstrators for hours with few, if any, breaks for food or personal needs, being shouted at and spit upon, some inappropriate responses can be expected. The overwhelmed officers, when finally asked to act, can easily overreact. The squad leaders and field commanders need to have these conditions as a primary concern.

Next, foster the support base. Businesses such as Nike, Starbucks, McDonalds and clothing stores selling animal furs can be valuable allies. They are frequently targeted by anarchists and depend heavily on the police to protect their assets. Ask for their help as partners in the community information and police training campaign. Ask for their endorsements to build the political will and public support base.

The final plank of the campaign is to find avenues of influence. Identify

community members who are willing to listen to the police plans and philosophy for crowd response. Let them be a police advocate in the community. The strategy of the police manager can be dismissed as self-focused. It would be difficult to dismiss influential community members for the same reason.

Prepare

The maximum exposure will come from response to crisis. Crisis response always entails risks, and the consequences of the decisions could be devastating, as demonstrated in the backlash after the Seattle WTO riots. Time will always be against the department. Use the 1/3-2/3 rule: managers take 1/3 of the total planning time, and allow subordinates to take 2/3 of the total planning time. If this rule is applied at each level of the organization, the subordinates will have maximum time to prepare.

In the preparatory phase, clearly define the Rules of Engagement (ROE). These rules tell officers how they are expected to respond to the crowd. What are some triggering events that would precipitate a response by officers? What level of response is reasonable when the crowd engages in specified types of behaviors? Tell officers what force levels are authorized without any further direction from the Incident Commander (IC). Delineate what authority is given to squad leaders, mobile field force commanders and the IC. Consult legal counsel about the content of the ROE, since the operation order and the ROE will be discoverable for any litigation.

Establish interagency agreements for mutual aid. Identify points of contact well in advance. Have standing agreements with whatever agency is responsible for fire suppression, trash removal, street cleaning, and prisoner detention. Include Fire and EMS personnel in the planning. Have a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with mutual aid entities that delineates who is in charge, and who is responsible for what. After mutual aid has gone home, the community will hold the department answerable for actions from outside departments.

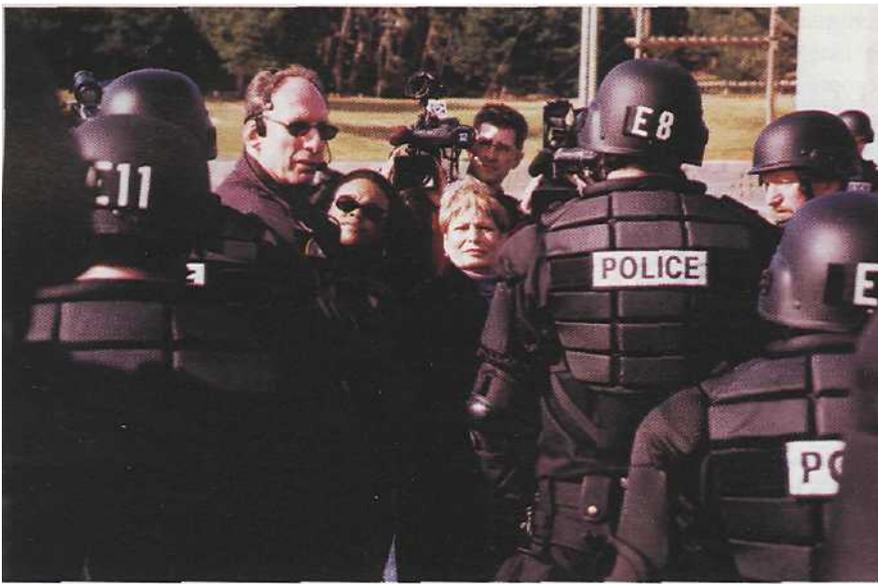
Momentum

The next concept critical in crowd control is momentum. Certain foreseeable issues influence whether the crowd or the police possess the momentum. Momentum represents the energy necessary to perpetuate or accelerate the respective group's actions. Groups have gathered as both violent and non-violent crowds. How they act, and are responded to, dictate how they bloom and develop their momentum. As they begin to develop a group psyche, they are further emboldened by chanting and focusing their energy. If they gain strength in cohesive numbers, they have the first step in momentum. If they begin to establish their strength, such as collectively deciding on a goal or direction, they become further empowered.

Acts of civil disobedience and criminal behavior further establish the idea that they can self-direct behavior with little or no impunity. This formula is ripe for unchecked criminal acts. The police must try to stop the crowd from gaining this criminal momentum. Every time the police set limits and fail to enforce them, speed is added to the crowd's momentum. If the police give up ground, they again feed that momentum.

At certain points, the police can disrupt the momentum cycle of the crowd. The first point of influence is the initial police deployment, which may be dictated by the community expectations. However, decide in advance what kind of police image is to be projected. Making a potentially problematic crowd aware that the police are present and are capable of acting is important. Showing a portion of a well trained, well-disciplined force can accomplish a lot towards building the police momentum and stealing the momentum from the crowd. If the police display an ill-equipped, ill-trained and ill-prepared force, this will feed the momentum of the crowd.

The next point is behavioral expectations. What will the police allow the crowd to do before they take action? It may be acceptable for a self-controlled group to occupy a public park to raise the community's awareness of minority issues. If an agitated group



wants to occupy the police station to protest police brutality, officers need to intercede early. If possible, contact a person in charge of the crowd and relate the expectations. If legally possible, record this conversation, as it may be reported differently later. They may reject the police overture but at the very least, the attempt at outreach places the department on the high ground with both the community and potential litigants. Tell them what is expected and what they can anticipate for consequences.

Anything that can be done to reduce the anonymity of demonstrators will be beneficial in undermining the crowd's momentum. Many organized demonstrations will have their own videographers. Deploy police videographers early and to strategic locations. Many times, the police can capture people putting on their masks or disguises. Some communities have laws prohibiting behavior that would prevent identifying people who act out in the crowd, such as the prohibition against wearing a mask during demonstrations.

Plan

Before facing a potentially unlawful crowd, develop a plan. If the intelligence sources are adequate, time will exist to plan. If not afforded the time, have a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the unplanned event. If a series of events takes place and the plan is to deploy resources in response to certain actions, use an execution matrix. This method reflects an

"action versus resource" grid. It directs that when a certain action is taken by the crowd, such as arriving at a certain location or reaching a certain size, the response team will respond in a pre-planned action, such as deploying across a street or activating a reserve force. An execution matrix lends itself



to command and control methods that will remain clear in the midst of confusion and the near-certain failure of radio communications. Geographic landmarks, crowd action, or even a timeline can dictate a response. Integrate the priority of effort into the response matrix. The priority of effort dictates what deployed elements are first in line for critical assets, such as horse mounted officers, gas distribution systems, less-lethal munitions and reserve forces.

The Operations Order should include a threat assessment. Obtain information about the crowd. What is their organization? What weapons have they used in the past, including bleach, urine or paint in balloons? Have they sued police in the past? How

do they use scouts and videographers to gather intelligence on police operations? Have they used electronic devices to jam police radio and cell phone communications? What vehicles are associated with this group? What counter-measures have they used for police tactics, such as lining clothing with layers of cardboard to defeat less-lethal munitions, the use of gas masks or holding children to keep police from using force?

One IC should direct the operation and identify that person to all involved. This makes direction clear, unambiguous and contiguous. The IC should be the most qualified, the most defensible and the person given the authority to take whatever action becomes necessary. While changing IC in the middle of an exercise can be very problematic, there should be an assistant IC to take over if needed—excellent training for a future IC.

Plan for sustainability. During the WTO protest, the Seattle Police worked their officers several extra hours per day for several days. Develop a plan to supply water, food, and perhaps even temporary housing for the officers. If officers are needed on skirmish lines for extended periods of time, determine how they will get restroom and meal breaks. Many jurisdictions have learned the hard way that letting officers face abusive protestors for extended periods, and allowing officers to become fatigued, is a formula for problems including inappropriate responses.

Tactics

Determine where the police will encounter and resolve the disturbance. Use the forces to channel and direct the crowd movement. Select the location of the main effort so the engagement is as safe as possible. Try to minimize potential targets, such as businesses with large windows, easily accessible weapons (bottles, rocks, sharp objects), fuel (newspapers, wood, gasoline) or terrain (multi-story buildings) that gives the advantage to the protestors.

Isolate the opponent leaders as much as possible. If they can resupply their people, rotate their people, and their command and control element can move in and out freely, they have



gained an advantage. If they become isolated, then they lose some of their power base. They cannot use bystanders and passive participants to hide or support their actions. Their participants become hungry, thirsty, cold or hot, tired, and need to use a restroom. All of these factors deplete the crowd's momentum. During the WTO protest in Seattle, leaders passed freely in and out of the crowd, providing direction, intelligence and encouragement. Again, interdicting the leadership enhances the police momentum.

Use police force multipliers, such as mounted, bicycle, ATV, motorcycle and airborne officers. Mounted officers, for example, can be worth four to five times as many officers on foot. They make an excellent lead element for squad movement. In most agencies, however, these assets are limited, so determine the most effective use of these assets. Do not hold these assets in reserve, instead use these force multipliers to economize the line forces.

Another type of force multiplier is the wide variety of crowd control weapons systems, including gas, sting ball weapons, impact weapons, pepperball guns and foggers. A relatively small force can easily clear the streets

of a large and hostile crowd using a series of stingball grenades. The same is true for the use of OC and chemical agents, however, many groups arrive with their own 2as masks.

Consider how to best use the reserve force and rear security. Force multipliers do a great job of clearing an area, but the crowd can quickly flank the force or regain ground if the

response does not include some kind of follow on security element. The reserve should be a non-committed force that can deploy to support the main effort, reinforce where needed, or provide follow on missions if necessary. Use the reserve force to replace officers that become ineffective due to accidental gassing or become separated and need to reconstitute. Part of the execution matrix will be the trigger for the deployment of the reserve.

Make wise use of natural barriers. Consider using these to enhance effectiveness of the police maneuvers. Recognize the difference between a blocking force and a turning force. It will take fewer officers to cause a moving crowd to change directions than it will to stop a moving crowd. Only use a blocking force if sufficient officers are available and if the response plan directs what to do with the crowd once they are stopped. The decision to move a crowd could minimize damage and cause the crowd to splinter. This is a mixed blessing. Splintering can take some of the power away from the crowd, but the police may end up with several smaller groups of troublemakers.

If the plan is to turn or block the crowd, consider using natural and man-made barriers to enhance the plan and do more with fewer officers. In urban areas, buildings, bridges and freeways can take the place of several squads of officers. Non-human barriers can easily isolate problem areas into controllable cells. In the more rural areas, streams, ditches and dense foliage can provide natural barriers.

Establish at least one rally point. In the event that officers become separated from their squad, or communication breaks down, there should be a place where officers go to regroup. This can also be a staging area for support elements, such as *fire*, crews, ambulance, public works and mass transit.

Sustainment

Logistics may not cause a win, but it can certainly cause a loss. Consider how to continue the police response for more than 12 hours. Start with the basics: food, water and rest. Stores of bottled water can be invaluable for potential crowd control events, as well as any occurrence that ties up officers for periods of time, such as major traffic accidents, crime scenes, natural disasters, plane crashes, search and rescue operations. Establish a contractual relationship with several vendors that could provide meals if necessary. Explore the option of having a small reserve of non-perishable, storable food typically used by hikers and campers. The military has MRE (meals, ready to eat) that have a long shelf life and are acceptable to the pallet. Have an established emergency call up plan, and publish the plan so all of the employees know the procedure. Inform police supervisors regarding what event will trigger the call up, and what their authority is to initiate that call up for relief officers. Remember the pass through effect: water and food that enter the human body will eventually pass through. Make sure that

officers have access to restroom facilities.

Sustainment preparedness should include the police infrastructure. How will vandalized tires be replaced? How will police vehicles be refueled? What other vehicles are available in the event of damage? If the police headquarters or command post is inaccessible or becomes unoccupiable, what facilities are available? What fiscal assets are available to make special purchases? What back up communications system is available? Do not count on cell phones. What stores of the specialized equipment for crowd control are available? Seattle Police put out a regional request for assistance for more tear gas following the first night of the WTO protest.

Recovery

Having successfully completed the mission to preserve life and property, review with the staff what went well and what did not work as desired. Record that information and act upon recommendations for change. Replenish stockpiles. Spend some effort to expand the foundation of support from the community. Check to see if the event has impacted the line officers in a way that needs attention, such as medical attention, counseling or time off. Work with the prosecutor to insure that the justice system visibly deals with law violators. This may set the stage for the next event, especially if no one is prosecuted.

Start the planning process now. Work on acquisition of the political will. Educate the community. Get the agency ready for an occurrence. A well-prepared police department can protect the rights of protestors while still protecting the lives and property of the citizens of the community.

Scott Winegar is with the Portland, OR, Police Bureau. His area of responsibility includes the downtown business district, site of most of the civil disturbances in his jurisdiction. He can be reached via email at swinegar@police.ci.portland.or.us