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Sir Paul Condon QPM,
Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis
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INTRODUCTION

During the last two decades, the media have taken the image of British Policing on a roller coaster ride from icon to Aunt Sally and back to an acceptance of the necessity and heroism of everyday policing. At a low point a few years ago, a broadsheet editorial described the police service as "a fish rotting from the head down". At the other extreme, the murder of a police officer releases a wave of sympathy, praise, respect and revulsion.

Interestingly, surveys suggest that the general public's view of policing has not been so volatile and fickle during this same period of time. The police service has remained one of the most respected and trusted organisations in the country. I believe that public confidence in policing is attributable to three factors.

First, a nostalgic longing for this country to be the best at some things in the world, and policing, like the armed services, falls into this category. I take great pride in the admiration, and indeed envy, that British policing engenders in other countries.

Secondly, there is a great belief and adherence in this country to the notion of individual freedom and liberty. Without doubt, people want to enjoy life unhindered

by crime and the fear that it produces, and look to the police to enforce and maintain the law firmly. However, at the same time they do not want intrusive methods, overt force or a lack of discretion to impose unnecessarily upon their everyday lives. "Being seen to be fair" would be an apt summary.

Over the years, the traditional impartiality of the police service has met, and continues to meet, these needs. Independence from the political process, responsibility under the law and accountability to local communities are all real strengths in protecting and preserving individual freedom. They should not be taken lightly and I believe they are respected by the vast majority. Perhaps that is why the police service is still able to operate predominantly without arms, relying upon persuasion and consent as opposed to force.

Thirdly, people's everyday, practical experience of policing is reassuring. If they are a victim of crime or involved in a traffic accident or call upon any other police response, they receive, by and large, a very reasonable service.

What I intend to do in this lecture is to consider the future of policing into the 21st century. I have spoken briefly about our image but what of the reality? Do we have the necessary structures, organisation and policing style to survive and prosper against a background of rapid technological and social change? I will argue that we already have in place a sound foundation on which we can build. However, in some places the foundation is too weak to sustain additional pressure, and change is necessary.

Partnership has become the fashionable word to describe the future of policing. We use it and abuse it a great deal within the service and all the political parties advocate more of it. I will use partnership as the theme to explore the future of policing. In particular I will look at partnership in action in relation to three important issues facing the service.

FIRST - Organised and International Crime

SECOND - Volume Crime

THIRD - The size and structure of local police forces.

ORGANISED AND INTERNATIONAL CRIME

I am not confident that we can enter the 21st century with the status quo in relation to combating organised and international crime. The piecemeal approach that has evolved in recent years means that we are coping but I believe we can and must do more and this will require change. The international scene is developing with increasing pace and we cannot afford to get left behind. Borders are coming down, trade is expanding, financial markets and services are becoming integrated. In short, we are no longer an island protected by the sea from unwelcome influences.

We should be in no doubt that organised crime will exploit every opportunity, technological advance or weakness to expand. Unfortunately, organised crime does not abide by its popular image. It is not the preserve of certain "East End" families and neither does it affect only those who participate. Organised crime, with its

international links and quasi-corporate structures, is in reality responsible for flooding the streets with dangerous drugs, undermining financial systems, and by the sheer financial "muscle" it has available, is a real threat to the integrity and effectiveness of the rule of law. Although it may not affect the man in the street directly in the same way as burglary or street robbery, it is certainly as great a threat to individual freedom and liberty and is becoming ever more complex and sophisticated. The current emphasis within the police service upon local control and autonomy most certainly suits local crime problems, but it is no longer appropriate in tackling criminals who move from crime to crime like profitable commodities, and who operate across international boundaries.

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This has certainly been recognised by my colleagues over the past few years. In 1989 when Sir Peter Imbert gave this lecture, he advocated a national overlay to deal with criminal intelligence and the investigation of the most serious of national and international crime. In 1992 when Sir Hugh Annesley gave this lecture, he argued for a National Crime Squad and a National Anti-Terrorist Unit. In 1995 the House of Commons, Home Affairs Committee, reported:

"The present structure of separate Regional Crime Squads, with no central executive direction, needs to be replaced by a more nationally co-ordinated structure."

Also this year, Albert Pacey, the Director General of NCIS (National Criminal Intelligence Service) argued for a more proactive role for his personnel in terms of mobile surveillance and access to methods already in use by other agencies.

In addition, there is the question of the role, where appropriate, of the Security Service with regard to these issues and it seems that every few weeks the media generate a new line on the future involvement of the Security Service in matters which have historically been the responsibility of the police service. There is great strength in exploiting fully the experience, different methods, powers and potential of differing agencies in tackling common problems. After all, that is the essence of partnership. The challenge is how to ensure the activities of the Security Services and others can be fully integrated into the fight against organised crime within a clearly understandable and effective structure. Or put another way, how to take advantage of diversity without creating confusion.

At the moment, I fear that we do not have a critical mass of consensus to take us forward. There are many understandable and respectable vested interests in play. ACPO has a wide spectrum of views and opinions as do senior colleagues in other agencies and in party politics.

My personal preference is to build upon NCIS and Regional Crime Squads. I would like to see NCIS given more operational freedom and responsibility. I believe Regional Crime Squads do require more National Co-ordination and Direction. I also

advocate the need to explore the boundary management issues of the Security Service, Customs, Inland Revenue and indeed any agency which can make a contribution to combating organised and international crime. We should be greatly encouraged by the extent to which many agencies have demonstrated understanding of the problems and the benefits of co-operation.

I am not satisfied that the current debate has explored all the vital issues of:

ACCOUNTABILITY

RESOURCING

COMMAND and

INTEGRATION of effort.

ACPO, the Metropolitan Police Service and other agencies should be prepared to relinquish part of their current independence for the greater good. If for example that means a transfer of resources and indeed prestige from Scotland Yard to a National Organisation, I would be prepared to support such a move.

I believe we need a mechanism to take this debate forward. It is of fundamental importance to the future of policing and is necessary if we are to discharge our responsibilities as a European and indeed world partner in the fight against crime. A few years ago a Royal Commission would have seemed an appropriate means to consider this matter. However, with less reliance on Royal Commissions, another mechanism may have to suffice. Time is not on our side and I hope that this debate will be taken forward to conclusion in the near future.

PARTNERSHIP TO COMBAT VOLUME CRIME

Until quite recently we experienced an inexorable rise in reported crime and some commentators assumed and stated that more crime automatically meant police failure. To some extent the police service contributed to this analysis by implying that if only the service had more resources, it would defeat crime. I believe we have moved on to a more informed and realistic debate about the nature of reported crime and some of the potential remedies.

Most of the increase in reported crime relates to stealing things. In London only 8% of all reported crime is anything to do with violence. Burglary accounts for 20% of reported crime in the Metropolitan Police District, autocrime (theft of and from motor vehicles) represents 22% and other theft 25%. Over 2/3rds of reported crime is about stealing things.

We should not be surprised by the increase in reported crime simply because there are so many new things to steal. There has been an explosion in the production of a whole range of goods. Motor vehicles, electrical goods, computers and mobile phones to list but a few. In our professional lives, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of items in every dwelling which can be stolen and converted into cash. When I started as a constable in the East End nearly 30 years ago, it seemed that most burglaries were in shops, factories and warehouses because that was where stealable property was to be found. The average home had a television, a radio and cash to be

stolen. Compare and contrast that situation with almost every dwelling nowadays where perhaps as many as 10 to 15 items of electrical goods can be stolen and readily converted to cash. The typical burglary or theft is opportunist, unsophisticated and crude and the thief relies on the fact that he can rapidly and easily convert his stolen property to cash. As a society, we often aggravate this situation by our ambivalence to the morality of finding a quick bargain. Too often there is an Arthur Daley or Pop Larkin romantic view of "it fell off the back of a lorry." Whilst condemning the criminal it seems that a "bargain" is quite legitimate and beyond the law or ordinary standards of behaviour!

In the last couple of years there has been a reduction in reported volume crimes of stealing and I believe we are on the threshold of significant reduction in reported crime if we exploit a partnership approach.

In an ideal world that partnership would embrace individual citizens, the business community, local and central government and the police service. However, general exhortations for individual citizens to take better crime prevention measures often falter, and local and central government have many competing demands for resources and effort. They can contribute to a climate which encourages crime prevention but I believe the police service and the manufacturers and distributors of consumer goods can make a dramatic contribution to the reduction of volume crime.

The police service has also made tremendous changes in the way that it approaches crime problems and these are having significant impact upon volume crime. Both

tactics and technology have improved beyond all recognition in a relatively short space of time.

For example, the police service has recognised the importance of putting more emphasis on the criminal rather than responding in an episodic way to individual crimes. An acceptance that a relatively small number of active criminals are responsible for a relatively large amount of crime gave birth to a whole series of initiatives in every police force in the country.

In London, Operation Bumblebee is a good example of such an initiative. Active burglars were identified, targeted and kept under surveillance as part of a comprehensive attempt to reduce the incidence of the crime which worries Londoners most. As a result, reported burglaries in the Metropolitan Police District have reduced significantly during the last two years. To put it in more human terms, that means tens of thousands of Londoners are spared the trauma of being burgled.

The police service is also making greater use of advances in science. DNA, automatic fingerprint recognition and sophisticated crime analysis packages are all helping to improve police performance against volume crime. Closed Circuit Television systems are also emerging as an important contribution to volume crime reduction.

Of course there is a balance to be struck here between the use of plain clothes officers for surveillance, and on the other hand the reassurance, if not always the effectiveness, provided by the patrolling uniformed officer. At the moment the

balance is being maintained, but should volume crime start to rise again then the pressure to detect and arrest offenders may be at the expense of uniformed patrolling. That would be a significant loss and disappointment to many.

However, this need not ever happen. I do believe even bigger reductions in volume crime are achievable if those who produce and sell consumer goods can become more active and innovative partners in the fight against crime.

In 1921, one of my predecessors wrote in his Commissioner's Annual Report as follows:

"It is particularly noticeable how many thefts of motor vehicles are due to the negligence of the owners. Out of 624 cars and motor cycles reported stolen in 1921, no less than 394 had been left unattended in the street. If insurance companies and underwriters would combine to put their assured on stricter terms, much crime of this and other kinds would be avoided."

Similarly, ten years later in 1931, Lord Trenchard the then Commissioner wrote in his annual report:

"I am hopeful that the motor industry will before long evolve some simple device which will make it impossible or at least difficult to drive cars away and if such a device becomes recognised as a standard fitting of an up to date

British car, I am convinced that a considerable decrease in this type of crime will follow.”

Lord Trenchard's comments were optimistic with regard to timescales, but in recent years the motor industry has responded extremely well to the challenge of making cars harder to steal or joy ride. As a result, car crime in London dropped by 17% last year and this enabled the Met to record the biggest two year percentage reduction in crime since 1954/5. But we must keep the momentum going. The potential gains are enormous - fewer victims, a reduction in the fear of crime - police time freed up for reassuring general patrol, which in turn will enhance the quality of life of communities.

The big challenge is for other industries and manufacturers to emulate the efforts and success of the motor industry. Certainly the Financial Services and the Credit Card industry have also shown welcome leadership in this area. Corporate citizens must become corporate partners in the fight against the high volume crimes associated with stealing. We need to break the simple chain which allows goods to be stolen and then without any remedial action sold to an innocent or duplicitous buyer. We need to encourage a climate in which goods which can be easily stolen and sold on are as unacceptable as products which cause pollution or environmental damage.

I do not wish to discourage innovation and product development or the freedom of the market place, but I do wish to encourage a climate in which manufacturers and

retailers celebrate and highlight the crime prevention qualities of their products.

Where might this approach lead us?

- Mobile telephones which cannot be reused and therefore have no resale value if stolen
- Computers and in particular computer memory chips which cannot be easily used if stolen and passed on to a new user
- Electrical goods such as televisions, video recorders, cameras and radios which have a PIN number or other simple device which restricts their use to lawful use by lawful owners.

Advances in technology and product design give us the potential opportunity to break the chain which currently allows opportunist thieves to crudely steal from our homes and cars and then without any technical alteration of the stolen property sell it quickly for cash.

To maximise the partnership approach to volume crime, we should encourage a more determined approach to crime prevention. If volume crime reduction is to be seen as a serious and achievable objective, it must be marketed and encouraged in a way that captures the public imagination.

Perhaps we should look again at the infrastructure which provides the carrot and stick for crime prevention. Do we have the necessary regime of fiscal incentives and penalties in place to encourage product design and development? Do we integrate the

expertise and ideas of the private sector, academia and the police service? I believe more can and should be done. To be frank I suspect that product design and development will contribute more to crime prevention than a general exhortation to individuals to take better care of their homes and cars.

THE SIZE AND STRUCTURE OF LOCAL FORCES

Will greater emphasis on a partnership approach to policing have implications for the size and structure of police forces? In recent years some commentators and indeed senior police colleagues have advocated a National Police Service or a regional structure. They list the potential benefits as consistent policies, economies of scale and reduced management overheads.

Personally I am not convinced. I do not think there is a formula which will give us an optimum size or structure for police forces. Last year we commissioned a survey of 3,500 Londoners and we sought their views on a whole range of issues concerning the Metropolitan Police. We asked "Would you like more information about the police and if so what would you like?" The majority wanted more information and significantly the information they most desired was the name of the local police officer with responsibility for policing their street or block of flats. I think this illustrates something far more significant than a nostalgic desire for a local bobby on the beat. It think it goes to the heart of the traditions of our policing style. Local

officers policing local communities from local police stations. So in many ways the most important building blocks in the police organisation are individual police stations.

The police service, of its own volition, has carried out a quiet revolution in recent years and the majority of police officers in charge of police stations have both the freedom and the responsibility to respond to local policing needs. Freedoms which would generate envy and perhaps fear in their predecessors of only a decade ago.

If we get local policing style and organisation right, then how we aggregate beyond that is of less importance. I remember when I went to Kent as Chief Constable the local paper in Maidstone had a front page picture of a new resident beat officer for the centre of the town, in uniform on his bicycle. My arrival was a couple of column inches on page 4 and that is right and proper. The relative merits of a force of 1,000, 3,000 or dare I say 28,000 are difficult to tease out. Economies of scale, consistent policies and a reduction of management overheads can all be achieved within the current framework.

Partnerships are built over time and I do not underestimate the importance of historical links, local cap badges and uniforms and local force identities. I believe that local policing should remain firmly rooted in the local democratic process and I do not think there is much to gain from compulsory amalgamation of smaller forces.

In fact, I would say there is more to be gained in concentrating our efforts on formal partnerships with local authorities and businesses. Certainly in London, the willingness of local government to become involved practically in community safety issues has led to some remarkable transformations in certain areas. Designing out crime, environmental improvements, revised housing and planning policies, the use of bye laws and educational initiatives are just some of the ways in which local authorities have complemented firm and effective policing. By tackling crime problems and their influences simultaneously, long term success has become much more likely. Certainly the quality of life of many people has been improved.

SUMMARY

I am immensely proud of the performance and integrity of the British Police Service. I am often humbled and in awe of the courage and dedication of police officers and their families. British policing remains the benchmark for excellence throughout the world and the service is determined it should remain so in the 21st century.

We are in good shape to survive and prosper in the next century but if partnership is to be our leitmotiv, some change is essential.

I do not think our current structures allow us to punch at our full weight against organised and international crime and the status quo will not serve us well in the next century. Our European and indeed world partners against crime will run out of patience if we do not evolve a one stop shop approach to their involvement with us. I

acknowledge the real concerns around accountability, funding and command and these require widespread consultation and measured deliberation. I hope we will develop an appropriate mechanism to do justice to this formidable challenge.

There are encouraging signs that a partnership approach to volume crime is paying dividends. Changing police tactics, product development and a tougher climate towards persistent offenders have all contributed to recent successes. There are enormous benefits still to come if we harness this partnership approach. The police service will play its part by placing greater emphasis on targeting, surveillance, analysis and the use of technology. We now seek and encourage a climate in which government, consumers and manufacturers exert pressure for crime prevention qualities in products to become as important as green issues have become in generating environmentally friendly products.

A differently structured National Crime Prevention Centre or Agency with more involvement of local authorities, the private sector and academia would give further impetus to this process. In view of their increasing influence and responsibility, I can see many benefits in providing a strong forum where all of these agencies can inspire, inform and develop any necessary changes to crime prevention practice.

If we deliver an enhanced response to combating organised and international crime and to reducing volume crime, then I do not think we need radically alter the structure and organisation of local policing and local police forces.

The evolving and successful partnership approach places us at the threshold of a renaissance of British Policing and I look forward to policing the early part of the 21st century with confidence.