



POLICING DURING CRISES AND IN AN ERA OF NEW CHALLENGES

Date: November 24, 2022

Disclaimer: This briefing note contains the encapsulation of views presented by the speaker and does not exclusively represent the views of the Canadian Association for Security and Intelligence Studies.

KEY EVENTS

On November 24, 2022, Chief Constable Del Manak of the Victoria Police Department presented on *Policing During Crises and in an Era of New Challenges*. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points of discussion were the methods of dealing with protests, priorities and issues during protests, the lessons learned during the Ottawa Freedom Convoy protest, and the benefits of collaboration between police agencies.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

Chief Manak presented on the Victoria Police Department's (VicPD) tactical, strategic, and operational structure on their methods of dealing with protests, the priorities during a protest, issues that may arise and test the contingency plans made, and the usage of social media as an intelligence tool. Chief Manak also spoke on the lessons learned during the Ottawa Freedom Convoy protest and the benefits of collaboration between police agencies.

Question & Answer Period

Chief Manak discussed predictions of what protests in 5-10 years would be like and the issues that law enforcement may face. He also discussed the advantages and disadvantages of heavy police presence during protests, intelligence as driving factors, and the lessons learned during the Ottawa Convoy protest.

BACKGROUND

Presentation

Chief Manak began the presentation with an overview of how VicPD works closely with other agencies such as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), and the Vancouver Police Department to maintain public order and public trust within BC. He stated that VicPD has dealt with protests in the forms of demonstrations, rallies, marches, blockades, and building occupations. If things escalate, they can lead to mischief, vandalism, or assaults. Chief Manak remarked that the priority during protests is that Charter rights are respected by all sides and the protests are allowed to continue as long as they are safe, peaceful and lawful.

There are some instances where a minority of protesters are professional agitators, who wish to disrupt peace and sow chaos, using their anonymity when among hundreds or thousands of peaceful protesters. Many of the current protests have transformed to highly organized events that are strategic in nature, mostly well-funded, and have surveillance and counter-intelligence capabilities that police agencies didn't have to plan for years ago. Groups are able to mobilize rapidly using private communications, making the job of managing public protests all that more difficult for police. For instance, police are more challenged to counter disruptive individuals with agendas who can negatively impact peaceful protests. Chief Manak remarked that the police must be able to maintain the public's trust and confidence when managing public protests by ensuring officers exercise a high degree of neutrality and impartiality and enforce the law where possible.

One strategic objective for protesters is to garner public interest for their cause and win support. In some cases, protesters will try to instigate officers to an emotional response and try and capture the officer's actions on photographs and/or recordings so these images can be posted on social media criticizing the police officers for their lack of professionalism. Chief Manak commented that his officers in Victoria were able to respond professionally during hundreds of public protests in 2021, even when they were instigated and taunted heavily by agitators.

Social media creates opportunities for police and the public to engage in a way that can build public trust and increase public safety. Intelligence and information can be tracked to allow police officers to engage with protesters, understand protest trends, and allow for pre-planning. To seek a common ground with the

protesters, police engage with organizers, monitor for segmented leaders, and identify hierarchies and internal conflicts of protest groups to prepare for protests. Engaging with protest organizers can help identify the strategic goals of the protest, aid the organizers in holding a peaceful protest, and ensure that the event is safe, peaceful, and lawful. Chief Manak stated that if the objectives are unsafe or not disclosed to the police, officers must be ready to respond in a manner that ensures the protest does not escalate to violence and that public order and safety is maintained.

The VicPD uses a United Kingdom (UK) model plan that helps with big picture organization of the Gold-Silver-Bronze command structure. Chief Manak feels that this allows for clarity, concisely outlined roles and responsibilities for each individual protest, and ensures that lines of authority and decision making are distinct. This model promotes adaptability, flexibility, and resilience to adjust to various scales of protests and unpredictable issues. In addition, contingency plans are important to ensure unpredictable issues can be addressed in a way that allows protests to continue in a safe, peaceful and lawful manner.

Chief Manak stated that briefings are held with all deployed officers that sets the officers for success. Officers must understand their legal authority, and be prepared for deviations in plans and unpredictability. Officers must also know when it is appropriate to take pictures so that they cannot be exploited on social media to present an anti-police narrative. The VicPD deploy trained police liaison officers who engage with protest organizers early and often to determine protest objectives and outline police expectations and guidelines. Chief Manak noted that officers must avoid using tactics that appear heavy-handed to the public unless such actions are warranted.

Lastly, Chief Manak used the Freedom Convoy protest and plans to occupy Victoria as an example to highlight communication and collaboration. Interim Chief Steve Bell of Ottawa Police Service (OPS) met with VicPD and the RCMP to share OPS's experience and lessons learned with the Freedom Convoy blockade in Ottawa to allow the VicPD to build a solid operations plan for the Freedom Convoy protest that was headed to Victoria. Chief Manak commented that large vehicles such as trucks introduce a major challenge for police due to their size and the manner in which trucks were used in the Freedom Convoy protests across Canada.

Question & Answer Period

Chief Manak predicted that in 5-10 years, engaging with the community and understanding their needs will allow police agencies to keep the peace in protests. It is imperative that balance is achieved while allowing people the democratic right to protest, as well as understand the political landscape so that police agencies are able to remain neutral and impartial.

Dominance in a public space is situation-dependent, as well as the risk or threat of injury to the public. Information on social media can be hidden from public view depending on the platforms the protesters use, which can cause detrimental harm if law enforcement is not aware of sudden changes in protests. It is imperative that the protests are allowed to happen in a safe and orderly manner without an escalation of violence.

Any event that can cause controversy or public attention is brought to police attention by the intelligence teams and driven by the intelligence available to them. It is important that police are aware of false information or misinformation so that they are able to sift through social media for things that can be used in actionable plans. Continuous assessment and adaptability are how plans can survive through crises.

Chief Manak commented that one of the biggest lessons learned from the Ottawa Freedom Convoy protest was that law enforcement was not able to adapt to the new threat. Law enforcement was familiar with organized crime groups such as Outlaw Motorcycle Gangs but not with decentralized groups in Ottawa during the protest. It is beneficial for law enforcement agencies to staff and train analysis and intelligence teams as they will be a key factor in maintaining public safety through identifying new protest organizations and protest organizers.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

Presentation

- Engaging with the public allows police to maintain public trust and confidence. Additionally, collaboration with partner agencies allows for continuous learning and a more strategic deployment of police resources.
- The Victoria Police Department follows a UK public order command model that uses a Gold-Silver-Bronze command structure.

- Police must maintain the public's trust and confidence by ensuring police officers are professional and maintain a high degree of neutrality and impartiality.
- Contingency plans are important to ensure unpredictable issues can be addressed in a way that ensures the protests can continue in a safe, peaceful and lawful manner.
- Briefings must be done in an effective manner and include officers knowing their legal authorities.
- Ensuring police officers are able to liaise with the protest organizers effectively allows for successful police/protest communication and increases the likelihood of a protest remaining peaceful.

Question & Answer Period

- Engaging with the community and understanding their needs while maintaining balance will prepare law enforcement agencies for protests in 5-10 years.
- How law enforcement deploys police resources depends on the situation and what the potential risk or threats are to the public.
- The Ottawa Freedom Convoy protest revealed that law enforcement agencies need to adapt to identify methods on how to deal with decentralized groups.



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