

Specialized patrol functions



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Specialized Patrol Functions: Friend or Foe Specialized patrol functions such as undercover sting operations, gang control, and drug enforcement have become an integral component of today's law enforcement operations. These units perform duties that require specialized training to deal with specific situations. They focus on a narrow field of criminal activity where they can utilize inside information, undercover agents, and tactics that would be ineffective or even dangerous for the inexperienced officer. These patrol forces are seen as necessary to maintain law and order in a society where weapons, drugs, and gangs have proliferated. They also leave themselves open to critics who say they go too far in their activities resulting in a hostile community where people exist in a police state.

Narcotics law enforcement is one of the biggest uses of a special force. The members of these units are trained in drug identification as well as knowledge of the drug business in a regional area. The duties often involve undercover work to initiate a buy or get information on drug activity.

According to the FBI, " Law enforcement officers often employ trickery and deception to catch those involved in criminal activity" (Kukura 1993). Kukura further states that the Supreme Court has upheld these tactics as legal. This may be effective at prosecuting international drug suspects or child pornographers. However, when it is used against small time drug users in local neighborhoods it can result in a community backlash of racism or injustice.

Gang activity in our major cities has grown to epidemic proportions. To effectively investigate and prosecute gang activity necessitates a specialized unit that understands the gang mentality and the law enforcement tools that are available to reduce gang activity. Police need information about

members' names, ages, modes of transportation, spending patterns, and the political climate of the neighborhoods they operate in (Bureau of Justice 1997). They must also work closely with other agencies such as the DEA and ATF. The local residents may live in fear of reprisals for being a witness for the prosecution. Though the police will receive silent resistance to gang enforcement, the community is served and the backlash is only a self-survival attitude.

The recent attention placed on illegal immigrants has mandated special units to enforce employment laws and avidly seek out and deport criminal aliens. The US Patriot Act of 2001 broadened provisions for a specialized force to monitor foreign students and suspected terrorists (Congressional Research 2006). The broad application of these laws to the general population gives the perception of a dedicated and highly trained unit and can be counter-productive. Illegal immigrants may be more reluctant to report crimes in this environment. Lowell Massachusetts Police Superintendent Ed Davis states, "You can't have significant numbers of your population afraid to call the police. It becomes a very serious problem" (as cited in Ross 2006).

The perception of a specialized enforcement unit within a community will be dependent upon the nature of the crime involved and the threat of repercussions on the community. Whether it serves the community or alienates the residents is not mutually exclusive. As in the case of gang enforcement, there is overwhelming support for the elimination of gangs and little public cooperation with police efforts. Small time drug users and illegal aliens may be viewed as an integral part of the neighborhood and the enforcement units may be viewed as an unwarranted, and unwanted, intrusion.

References

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