

Confrontation or Partnership:

Law Enforcement Engagement of Muslim Communities

JUNE 1, 2007

On June 1, 2007, the Transnational Threats Project at CSIS hosted a roundtable to explore the interaction between police and Muslim communities around the world. Representatives from Germany, The Netherlands, and India provided brief presentations on engagement in their respective countries. This CSIS event followed an April 2007 keynote address by TNT Deputy Director Tom Sanderson, at INTERPOL headquarters in Lyon France. For that presentation, Sanderson interviewed police officers from India, Canada, Germany, France, Netherlands, and the UK. Future exploration on this issue is being considered for the Fall of 2007 in the Hague, Netherlands.

Following September 11, 2001, Madrid 2004, London 2005, and Canada's foiled June 2006 plot, law enforcement organization stepped up their outreach to Muslim, Arab, North African and other minority communities. Though both the police and Muslim communities represent frontlines against extremist violence, the relationship can be strained and adversarial. As law enforcement officials are often the only contact young Muslims have with state and local representatives in their communities, the facilitation and maintenance of clear communication channels between the two groups is essential.

Introductory remarks by roundtable moderator Tom Sanderson were followed by a brief presentation by Peter Slort, Country Attaché, Netherlands Police Agency (KLDPD). Slort emphasized the need for police forces to reach out to the Muslim majority and show them that the police are on their side. In addition, Slort cited the creation of a network of allies and an early warning system as essential components of effective policing in Muslim communities. Relationships forged between Dutch police and Moroccan youth leaders prove particularly useful when the youth leaders serve as intermediaries to quell situations and stem potential riots. Key to law enforcement success in Dutch Muslim communities are officers who can achieve a certain level of integration in the community in order to detect shifts in local sentiments.

Most of Germany's Muslim population is composed of Turkish immigrants, 1.9 million out of a population of 3.1 million Muslims, approximately 35% of which are now second or third generation. Stephan Krause, a German Federal Police Liaison Officer (BKA), highlighted the 2005 and 2006 meetings between German law enforcement, security services, and Muslim community leaders. The purpose of the meetings was to educate one another on police responsibilities and the Muslim experience. Krause emphasized the necessity for police representatives to interact with Muslim communities through social events and religious festivals that take place four to five times per year.

India's Muslim population, approximately 13% of the total population, is highly concentrated and has generally not been radicalized, according to Rahul Rasgotra of the Indian embassy. A National Minorities Commission serves as a statutory body with

representatives from all of the minority communities to project problems faced by minorities and suggest remedies to the government. Communal Harmony Committees, which operate at the local police level, also serve as a forum for Muslim representatives to air their concerns. In addition, special youth programs allow young Muslims to serve as auxiliary police and learn the fundamentals of law enforcement. India's primary goal is to downplay the religious aspects of incidents in an effort to keep local disputes from escalating to a national level, pitting India against Islam.

Tom Sanderson's concluding remarks underscored the benefits that positive contact and effective, regular communication can have in creating a helpful environment for both the police and minority communities. If law enforcement is to continue its efforts in Muslim districts, cultural training and hiring from within the minority communities themselves are a must.