Pearls in Policing

Singapore 2012

DELIVERING PUBLIC EXPECTATIONS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Group title – *POLITICAL INFLUENCE*

Question: How to influence the political process to optimize value of policing for delivering public expectations in a changing world

Brief Introduction

The first corner in the Trust-triangle is about the political influence. In a democratic society, the policy is approved by a political majority. This political majority also attributes the financial resources to execute consequently this policy.

Therefore, for a police organization, it is important to be able to weigh in on this political decision-making, especially in times of financial scarcity.

In what follows will first be zoomed in on the political process that affects the police, then vice versa, in order to discuss a case with a forward-looking approach.

1. Political influence on policing

Understanding the role of political influences on police services is important in determining the value of policing. Political influences take place both at the national and international levels.

1.1. Political influence on the national level

At the national level politicians form coalitions among themselves to decide the kind of services that police should offer. They'll agree that, in a democracy, they get this authority through the electoral processes. But whether they use this authority for the social good or just to keep them in political office is an unanswered question. Recent experiences in Syria demonstrate that politicians wield strong influences over the police services (and the military) to the perils of their own people. In other words, for the Syrian authority, using extreme force against their citizens is one way to maximize the value of policing, ostensibly to protect the sovereignty of the country.

But this is the wrong way of maximizing the value of policing. Central to the value of policing must be the interests of the community. The voice

of the community, except in extreme circumstances, must be represented in the processes which determine the value of policing.

Negative forms of influence

What are the channels of political influences on the value of policing? Politicians and government authorities use the threat of a reduction in the budget allocation as an incentive to get the police department to do what they want. And this episode of austerity is a good time for politicians and government authority to define what they believe to be the values of policing and thus influence police services along those lines. Unfortunately, police department s interested in preserving their budget allocation will carry out the wishes of politicians or government authorities.

"It's good to see more police on the street."

Secret weapon police

Another prominent channel that politicians use to get police departments to do their bidding is the promotion processes. Police officers who want to advance their career, at any cost, will see political influences as an incentive to demonstrate their political allegiance: this distort the values of policing. There is a trend in the United States where the incoming president almost always changes the FBI director and other key figures in the CIA. This is common in poor countries, but also in rich countries.

How to react as a police organization to respond to these negative forms of influence

Police services, however, are not powerless in fending off political pressures. Police services that develop a tradition of professionalism (in the form of the new professionalism) are unlikely to succumb to political

influences. And once politicians realize that the police service is a professional organization, they're less likely to bring unreasonable political pressures on law enforcement.
Moreover, police services that are opened to public scrutiny will provide the opportunity for the citizenry to detect undue political pressures; therefore the potential for the public to scrutinize the performance of the police service, serves as a disincentive for undue political pressure.

1.2. Political influence on the international level

At the international level, developed states often wring the hands of governments in poor states, by withdrawing aid and other assistance, to get the local police service to do what they define as values in policing.
For example, developed states often complained about human rights violations and police excesses in poor countries, this undermine the values of policing. If international political pressure is applied to get local police services to improve the values of policing this is a good thing and must be standard practice. Pressure from the United Nations and the Arab League on the Syrian state to stop the use of violence against the opposition is an example of how international politics can improve the values in policing.

2. Police influence on the political process