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REVIEW & REPLY

On “Projecting Stability: A Deployable NATO Police Command”

Raymond E. Bell Jr.

This commentary responds to Massimo Pani’s and Karen J. Finkenbinder’s article “Projecting Stability: A Deployable NATO Police Command” published in the Spring/Summer 2019 issue of Parameters (vol. 49, no. 1–2).

It will be interesting to see if a NATO Police Command will mature from a theoretical force structure to one of reality as so cogently argued by Massimo Pani and Karen J. Finkenbinder in “Projecting Stability: A Deployable NATO Police Command.” As a former brigade commander of the US Army Reserve 220th Military Police Brigade, my interest is piqued, especially when thinking about the manning of such a command.

I commend the authors for their forward thinking in developing the rationale for such a command but feel they might have taken their concept an additional step further and commented on the “who” situation in more detail. They could have addressed some of the personnel resources presently available, especially as pertains to US contributions to a US stability policing brigade but also to the other proposed necessary adjunct organizations and staff sections.

If the command were to be organized just from within today’s active duty US Army military police unit structure establishment, a difficulty would arise. The authors noted, “the most notable aspect that authorities and military commanders must understand about building a stability police force is that large numbers of novice police officers, swiftly equipped and hastily instructed, are detrimental to the success of security and stabilization operations.” This is a point well taken.

My experience was that the US Army Military Police Corps commissions officers and enlists soldiers who are what I consider the “cream of the crop.” Members must be capable of multitasking, specifically, accomplishing various police-related functions with professionalism. But by and large, the active duty corps does not have a broad-based complement of professionally mature and experienced personnel in its ranks.

The majority of the active duty, lower-ranking corps members must be considered novice police officers, although considering their high caliber, my evaluation is not to be construed as negative or degrading. Today’s enlisted individual or officer with an active duty commissioned or enlisted commitment simply does not have, nor can be expected to have, the experience gained by extended service in the corps.

Dr. Raymond E. Bell Jr., brigadier general, US Army retired, former commander of the 220th Military Police Brigade, US Army Reserves, holds a PhD in Central European history from New York University and is a military affairs and history writer.

Dr. Finkenbinder clearly has military police experience and is qualified to address the subject of effective manning. Her curriculum vitae states she served as “a municipal police officer, state police training and education specialist, and military police officer.” I suspect that hidden within those words is that she was not only on active duty service as a military police officer but also in the Army Reserve or National Guard in some military police capacity. If I am correct, then she fully appreciates from where the law enforcement professional assets can come to man a NATO police command outside the active duty Army force structure.

The law enforcement background of such Reserve component police personnel can be phenomenal. But individuals with other backgrounds related to combat, anti-criminal operations, community service, legal work, business enterprise, civilian government administration, and religious practice (to name a few) have, as noted in the essay, a place in the manning mix. That mix can be multicomponent.

In my brigade headquarters, for example, there were personnel whose performance over a four-year period showed that the integrated active duty Army, traditional Army Reserve, activated Army Guard and Army Reserve, and military technician combination of personnel worked harmoniously and effectively.

The traditional Army reservists in the brigade headquarters consisted of those with active duty Army combat arms and military police service in Vietnam, as well as those who were local and regional full-time correctional and police officers, US Department of Agriculture and US Department of State employees, college professors, civilian military intelligence and Central Intelligence Agency professionals, writers, Naval Criminal Investigative Service investigators, lawyers, hospital administrators, and clergy.

Some had advanced degrees including doctorates. All these personnel were experienced in their civilian capacities, which would have contributed effectively to mission accomplishment had the brigade ever been mobilized. Indeed, in training deployments to Egypt, Jordan, and Somalia, the personnel had many opportunities to demonstrate proficiency in projecting stability.

Accordingly, a further step in manning a US contribution to a deployable NATO police command could be organizing an Army Reserve or Army National Guard brigade composed of experienced, component-integrated personnel available on the short notice the authors have stipulated.

In sum, it is encouraging to read of organizing a deployable NATO police command, but as the authors noted, it must be appropriately manned to accomplish its different anticipated functions and missions. I would like, therefore, to see the authors consider in more detail who should be in the force’s complement, with an eye toward integrating members of all US Army components and even investigating the participation of the other branches of service in the command.

The Authors Reply

Massimo Pani and Karen J. Finkenbinder

We agree with Brigadier General Raymond Bell's assessment regarding "civilian" policing expertise in the Army. Much of it is resident in the Reserve components as there are many civilian police officers serving within the Reserves and National Guard, however, there are broader issues at play here.

The United States is not ideal to conduct stability policing or lead any international police development program. Our decentralized, US state-centric system does not translate easily into international operations, notwithstanding one common denominator among American municipal and state police—their experience using discretion among civilians in their daily work practice, something likely not found among many military police in the active component. A civilian on a military post is quite different from one in a civilian community as the military has options to prevent entry and to remove troublesome civilians from its installations.

In contrast, stability police from gendarmerie-type forces (GTF), like the Carabinieri, have much longer training and education programs and they spend their careers in civilian communities, not on military installations. Further because of the nature of deployments, especially in recent years, GTF often have extensive experience in international operations. And they are police with civilian status and accepted by the United Nations as police.

In contrast, military police are not recognized by the United Nations as police for a police component, an important consideration as NATO missions often transition to UN or similar police or political-led missions. Similarly, the African Union and other regional organizations have similar philosophies—the military are not police. There's a reason for that. In many countries in which there are peace operations, security forces have been (and sometimes are) bad actors, related to a predatory, corrupt political class that came into power as the result of a coup supported by the military. The civilian police (clearly delineated from the military) under civilian control are necessary to build police institutions that respect the rule of law.

Can military police do stability policing? Absolutely! And we agree their professionalism goes a long way toward setting the standard for future policing. But this doesn't get to the longer-term institution building, built upon a civilian-control model, accepted by the population as legitimate. At best, military police can conduct stability policing for basic tasks as we get enough GTF into the operation to do it. And as the environment stabilizes, the

long-term development plan should transition supporting police to the type of police being developed.

The area of detention operations is one in which we believe military police are best suited to support, if their force structure allows. The military police, aside from one unfortunate incident in recent years, are by far the best at detention. The American Corrections Association's accrediting of military police-led detention facilities recognizes this. The rule-bound nature of detention and the technical competence and professionalism of military police officers make them a preferred provider of detention until the capacity to detain prisoners humanely can be built. There is less risk of disenfranchising the public when providing humane and transparent detention operations.

History shows that sustainable, civilian-led police institutions are not built by militaries in a top-down approach. "Militarized" police development tends to train and equip (it risks making corrupt police more efficiently corrupt) and misses the necessary bottom-up institution building necessary for legitimacy. Additionally, many of our international partners have GTF or other deployable police assets that can do such policing. This should also make us pause before the US military provides any support to civilian police under the auspices of security cooperation. Do we inadvertently risk delegitimizing the police when they begin to use military tactics, dress, or act like the military? We have seen this occur domestically when police adopt military practices.