

2008 National Fusion Center Conference
Chief of Police William J. Bratton
Speech

Sun Tzu, the oft-quoted Chinese general from the 6th Century, wrote that, “ ... if you know your enemies and you know yourself, you will not be imperiled in a hundred battles.”

Since terrorists struck our homeland seven years ago, those of us in law enforcement have struggled to do both. We have found ourselves faced with enemies that engage us using fourth generation warfare and wantonly disregard the traditional lines between civilians and the military or law enforcement. These enemies also share information and harness the gift of global connectivity in a way that brings about disorder, chaos and destruction. But we have learned about this enemy and we will continue to learn.

We have also learned a great deal about ourselves. Just like our enemies, we have adapted and we have learned to share information – always with an eye toward preserving the civil rights of the Americans whom we protect. Over the past six years information sharing has improved vertically – between the intelligence community and the nation’s state and local police departments – and horizontally, among the state and local departments themselves.

Fusion centers, which pool and analyze information from multiple jurisdictions, have served as one of our main tools in this new era of information sharing. Fusion centers now exist in nearly every state and will serve as the primary platforms for improving law enforcement’s intelligence-gathering, sharing and analytical capabilities in the years ahead.

Creating these centers of gravity, with participation by all levels of government, will maximize the chance that we will connect the dots, thus providing opportunities to prevent both traditional crime and terrorism. For the first time in our country’s law enforcement history, these centers have created an environment in which analysts from the federal government are working in concert with analysts across the National Fusion Center Network. Together they are identifying trends and patterns and sharing the information with all homeland security stakeholders in both the public and private sectors. We are seeing real progress in breaking down barriers and obstacles. Moreover, fusion centers are collaborating with DHS, FBI and among themselves to develop joint analytic products.

So, in the spirit of Sun Tzu’s famous quote, we are learning to better know ourselves and each other. This is no easy task. The United States’ 3.7 million square miles is home to nearly 300 million people. We have approximately 750,000 sworn law enforcement officers at the state and local levels spread among 17,500 different agencies. These officers are better attuned and accountable to their local communities than their partners at the federal level. We are the eyes and ears of our country’s communities. This has not

gone unnoticed in Washington, which is now realizing that the nation's 750,000 state and local police stand to play an important role as "first preventers" of terrorism.

Fusion centers are the bridge between police, who most understand the local landscape, and the federal partners, who best understand the global one. Recently, I had the pleasure of reading the first-ever intelligence product produced by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and the Joint Regional Intelligence Center (JRIC).

I was impressed by the collaboration, the quality and the speed with which this product was produced. This was a tremendous example of the evolving partnership between the DHS, the intelligence community, and the Los Angeles Police Department.

The result was a nationally, not federally, coordinated intelligence product that carried all three seals and met the needs of the homeland security community throughout the country. Fusion centers are now partnering with Washington to address critical information needs tailored to their regions. This is but one success. There have been others.

Now, let's address the ongoing debate over whether fusion centers should be strictly designed to counter terrorism or whether they should address "all crimes, all hazards."

To advocate the position that fusion centers should be strictly designed around terrorism demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the public safety risk, threat matrices, and the need to engage the majority of local law enforcement. It also demonstrates a complete lack of understanding about how terrorists are recruited, how terrorists plan and execute their operations and the criminal markets that support terrorist organizations.

The idea of terrorism has come a long way since the days of the Red Brigades. Al Qaeda, FARC and other groups have been successful at exploiting the vulnerabilities of their enemies. In our case, they attacked the arrogance and turf battles that were at the heart of our failure to communicate. As we heard Secretary Chertoff say in this forum last year: "We have to build a network to beat a network." That is precisely what we will do.

My position on the role and operation of fusion centers has been adopted by all the chiefs from America's large cities – intelligence must be gathered on all crimes and fully integrated into the daily operations of the police department. In our view, intelligence should inform and shape the wide range of police services that protect the public. For example, it is critical that we receive timely threat intelligence from the federal government so that we can determine what measures may be taken by police and emergency service agencies.

Even as we move toward an "all crimes, all hazards" model in our fusion centers, we must not lose sight of the terror threat. As the attacks of 9/11 recede from the national consciousness, some have begun to question whether the threat from terrorism has been exaggerated. They suggest that the law enforcement community is wasting limited

resources chasing after a nonexistent threat even as traditional crime trends upward in many American cities.

This is misguided thinking and only reinforces the need to – as our enemies do on the criminal side – converge our fight against traditional crime and terrorism. First, the terror threat facing the United States is still very real, current, and generational. Second, an effective national counter-terrorism strategy that helps federal, state, and local law enforcement better share information also helps police understand and effectively reduce traditional crime.

The major cities must be linked together at home and with our colleagues abroad so that intelligence may be shared between fusion centers and major agencies. The leaders of American law enforcement are communicating these and other priorities in Washington. Conferences like this one will help us to further define and articulate what is needed to get the job done.

Earlier you heard from Representative Jane Harman, who chairs the House Subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Terrorism Risk Assessment. Law enforcement commends her for unrelenting efforts to improve intelligence programs and we thank her for supporting local law enforcement initiatives like fusion centers and our programs at the LAPD.

The Program Manager for the Information Sharing Environment has made these local law enforcement models a top priority and we thank him for recognizing the vital role we play on the nation's intelligence team.

To strengthen that role, the major urban areas have established an Intelligence Commanders Group (ICG), consisting of the senior officer from every major city's intelligence unit. This unprecedented effort brings 56 top-level intelligence commanders together as part of a unified team. We will soon be delivering our Major Cities Chiefs position paper describing the ten tenets of local law enforcement's priorities and our purpose in supporting the protection of the homeland.

The LAPD has been asked by these cities to serve as an incubator for innovative approaches to information sharing. As a result, the LAPD will deploy, test and further develop a system for capturing Suspicious Activity Reports (SARs) with a nexus to terrorism. I will work with my colleagues, the Major Cities Chiefs, to ensure that lessons learned are documented and shared with other metropolitan areas.

While it will be challenging to share these new "dots" horizontally with regional fusion centers and vertically with the intelligence community, it is an obligation we must fulfill.

I am committed to working with Major Cities Chiefs, DHS, DOJ and the Information Sharing Environment Program Manager (ISE-PM) to ensure these Suspicious Activity Reports are shared with the national fusion center network. This panel will describe our

plan to develop a model that may be rolled out across the nation to standardize information sharing between federal, state and local agencies.

I often hear the question asked: “Are we safer since 9/11?” The answer, from my law enforcement perspective, is “yes.” Since 9/11, the law enforcement community has worked together better than ever before. We now have seats at the intelligence table and are no longer feeding off of the bread crumbs.

It is true, that we are better and stronger today. However, the danger we face from groups employing fourth generation warfare is limited only by our imaginations. It will be up to us to get inside their minds and win this battle. In all practicality, we may again find ourselves the victims of another terrorist attack on our soil. It is through our resilience and our understanding of our enemies and ourselves that we will not be defeated.

We have the ideas and the technology to create counter-networks and win this new kind of conflict. But, we also need the flexibility, adaptability, and transparency to collaborate with one another. We must develop more meaningful partnerships, more robust trust networks, and we must create policy that leverages law enforcement resources in the United States. It is this that will constitute our front line prevention and defense of the homeland.

Our region is a model of cooperation and innovation. We have made great strides in facing this threat but we still have much to accomplish.

Terrorism is not going to go away. It is going to continue through our lives, our children’s lives and their children’s lives. We will face the one hundred battles. This is going to be a tremendous challenge, but one we are prepared to meet with the full force of resources and resolve from law enforcement at the federal, state and local levels and the private sector.