

## IS THE POLICE MOVING FROM COMMUNITY POLICING TO WHOLESALE ORDER- MAINTENANCE?

Since Nicolas Sarkozy was named Minister of the Interior in March 2002, he has unceasingly combated community policing (*“police de proximité”*), with a relentlessness that contradicts the pragmatism with which many commentators credit him—rightly or not. The project was ambitious, a real organizational and cultural revolution in police services, and required a long-term investment, as was the case in the United States and some European countries. The results were encouraging, but variable from one city to another:<sup>1</sup> In spite of this, the team that arrived at the Ministry of the Interior with the man who was not yet president decided to put an end to the process.

Nicolas Sarkozy’s combat against community policing actually began very early. An official instruction dated October 24, 2002 requested that police officials adopt *“procedures for the implementation of community policing, giving priority to investigation and repression missions.”* Incentives were set up so that the police forces would be redirected from the local squads to “groups” purely aimed at repression—local security groups, crime squads (BAC), intervention division—which are not supposed to engage in discussions with people, but only to do identity checks and take them in. Inexperienced young officers were put in charge of neighborhood police stations in many problem areas, opening hours were cut, or the stations were

simply closed. Sarkozy's mediagenic statement in Toulouse on February 3, 2003 officially sounded the death knell of community policing: he went there personally, to decry police officers who do neighborhood work, condemning those who "play at sports" or try to be "social workers."<sup>2</sup>

It would be inaccurate, however, to contend that Sarkozy is the only one responsible for the destruction of community policing in France. The last years of the left-wing government (1997-2001) corroborated, de facto, a degree of withdrawal from what had nonetheless been the outstanding measure in its combat against insecurity and feelings of insecurity. Even the official advocate of that policy, Jean-Pierre Chevènement, had always shown moderate enthusiasm for this aspect.<sup>3</sup> Most of the police hierarchy, in turn, worked against the evolution toward a police force turned more toward the population. In that sense, Sarkozy's strategy is cogent with the French Jacobin tradition of centralized management of police affairs, leaving little or no room for what the public wants.

However, there are several reasons to believe that Sarkozy's opposition to community policing goes beyond the traditional stance of the French political/administration class, which often smugly considers control of the police as a major symbol of its power over society. For example, unlike some of their predecessors, the president and his team, although excellent communicators, did not maintain a semblance of community police while discretely emptying it of any real substance. They purely and simply did away with it, despite the possible price to be paid in terms of popularity, since there is every indication that the concept was extremely popular among citizens in 2002—and still is.

Another illustration of the president's hostility to community policing is the silence that greeted the various reports and missions of parliamentary representatives or high officials pleading in favor of this type of action.<sup>4</sup> Whereas all favored reviving community policing, especially after the November 2005 riots, and local elected officials readily confessed—publicly or in private—their desire to see a revival of that form of policing, it was all to no avail. The code of ethics of the Council of Europe states that police services should apply community policing methods, on the basis of a quality reference, and most European countries, including the former Eastern European dictatorships, have now turned to that model—but that does not shake the new president either. The revival of an embryonic territorialized police force announced in January 2008<sup>5</sup> is extremely timid, but in addition, it is attended by the much more concrete creation of security forces—equivalent to the CRS forces or national riot police forces—in the same sector. Priority is given to non-territorialized repressive forces, used for identity checks and taking people in, and not, then, to the creation of a genuine community police committed to a true public service, and even less to a problem-solving approach.

The refusal of this sort of police force cannot be viewed, then, as the outcome of a strictly rational process for setting up a more efficient police force, nor as a mere communications operation. It has to do either with ideology or with a strategy for regaining control of the police, or both.

## UNDERSTANDING THE REFUSAL OF COMMUNITY POLICING

In many respects, Sarkozy followed up on the discourse of his mentor, Charles Pasqua<sup>6</sup> who, when Minister, used his position to wreck attempts at community policing, known at the time as beat policing (*îlotage*). He too railed against “social-working,” “nice” police officers, diverted from their repressive functions. This is corroborated by the presence of some of Pasqua’s former advisers in (Minister) Sarkozy’s entourage.

Community policing policies, I might add, have turned out to be politically costly and not very convincing for the electorate in the last analysis.<sup>7</sup> When they translated into losses for the left—of town halls in 2001 and of the 2002 presidential elections—critics of this reform felt comforted in their views. A closer look would show, however, that community policing was not only truly successful, albeit locally and in some situations, but that in many other locations its failure had been programmed, by the ill will of police officials and/or lack of commitment at the grass roots level.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the outcome, at least for the mass media, was that this policy was associated with a rise in offending. That was one of the arguments on which the Minister of the Interior was to construct his strategy in 2002.

One reason why community policing has failed has to do with police officers themselves, or at least those most reticent about the idea of public service. Community policing represents a major reversal of the police officers’ priorities, especially in France. Indeed, officers traditionally view themselves as exemplifying hierarchical bureaucracy, enforcing orders from the Ministry whether they are appropriate to the local situation

or not. In fact, this conception leads to frequent discrepancies between national directives and the outcome at the grass roots level and, in the end, leaving considerable room for interpretation by officers in the field.

Community policing, with a “problem-solving” strategy as its essential component, wrecks that model, in that it is open to people’s needs: officers are assigned to a given territory to solve the problems brought to them by citizens. These may involve blatant offenses or simple concerns, such as finding a solution for some young people who are unoccupied, and whose mere presence “is frightening,” other than by identity checks and taking them in. So, instead of taking orders from their superiors, officers are faced with the expectations of the citizens they see day after day, and to whom they are answerable. The situation is much less comfortable for them, inasmuch as they have far less latitude for action, since they are observed by their employers, so to speak, and must justify their activity and its efficiency. The latter model is much more demanding as well, then, and elicits much reluctance among both superiors, reduced to a supporting role, and the rank and file, who have less leeway.

Faced with this discontent, the Sarkozy team succeeded in reassuring its troops by restoring the “basics” of the French police force: by going back to hierarchy and quantitative evaluation of activity. But they went further in that direction than their predecessors.

### **REPULSION FOR A SOCIAL ROLE**

Community policing, be it in its softer form, beat policing, or in the [socialist] Jospin administration’s more legalistic,

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more repressive version, raises the question—like it or not—of the social role of police officers. The truth is that when they are attentive to the population, including and above all the most underprivileged groups, officers are led to adopt a more comprehensive attitude, often against their will, and when engaged in a problem-solving approach, to engage in social action of sorts. Be that as it may, their 24-hours-a-day public service mission geared to responding to urgent needs leads them to do so, given the variety of situations with which they must cope. And proximity further accentuates this phenomenon. Officers are then led to play a number of roles, working at facilitation and assistance, and sometimes even voicing demands.

Until recently the gendarmes identified with this social role, as did many police officers up to the early 1990s. Beyond the practices officially imposed by the institution, they used their experience spontaneously to act as mediators or admonish people, reminding them of the law, or to “be serviceable” to some residents. They are now increasingly reluctant to accept these functions, which apparently do not coincide with their idea of the profession. Policing is a function suffused with myths, transmitted both by seniors and by the media. Many officers see themselves primarily as dispensers of justice, defending victims and the Law. They portray themselves as the last ramparts against disorder or barbarity. Very few, finally, view themselves as civil servants serving the public. For many, the BAC squad or investigations departments are the ideal, certainly not the police-run emergency services. This means that the image of the social worker is quite repulsive. Anything tending in that direction, and first and foremost community

policing, is rejected, then, except by a few motivated individuals, who are marginalized for that very reason.

Understandably then, the end of community policing satisfied most of them, at least at first particularly since it was accompanied by substantial financial and material benefits. Some may also have been seduced by the discourse according to which “order is back,” but most officers, and especially the older ones, were not taken in. They knew this was no response to the crisis in legitimacy that the police forces suffered in the neighborhoods considered most difficult.

At the Ministry, this refusal of a social role for the police corresponded to the messages, and most probably to the views of the minister. He has repeatedly made statements about the incongruity of that combination, in his opinion. The most outstanding instance was the November 2005 riots, when, contrary to all evidence, the minister chose to accuse extreme left agitators, dealers, and Muslim fundamentalists of having caused the agitation, whereas he had received a report from the intelligence branch of the police (*les Renseignements Généraux*)<sup>9</sup> stating serious reasons to account for the violence.

The emphasis placed on the police’s function of protecting the state is nothing new. Dominique Monjardet had pinpointed the opposition between law-and-order policing (serving the state) and security-oriented policing (serving citizens) with constant assertion of priority for the former.<sup>10</sup> The idea is to protect public buildings and official visitors, to control demonstrations and social movements in general so that they do not threaten the public order. In this framework, public safety is an adjustment variable taken into account by some officers, of

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course, but one depending on their priorities, those dictated by the authorities, and not on what the public wants. In a police force concerned with law and order, hierarchy prevails, and all action originates in the decisions of the minister, now (again) the protector of the Nation. Even when he announces the revival of a form of community policing, as was the case in January 2008, it is within this framework where initiative comes from above, from the ministry, and not from the grass roots.

The swelling number of forces devoted to fighting crime—of the BAC type—or to controlling citizens—of the CRS and “*compagnies d’intervention*” type<sup>11</sup>—clearly demonstrates this throwback to the older law-and-order policing model, if not to say its accentuation. This not only means more forcefully combating offending, but above all, rejection of any dialogue and engagement, a priori, in relations based on force and control.

An oversimplified view of these matters often leads commentators, and in fact some police officials, to associate social and preventive orientations on one hand, and order, safety and repression, on the other hand. Observation of police strategies has led us to a very different discovery, however—one which coincides with conclusions drawn from the experience of other countries.<sup>12</sup> Not only is community policing not synonymous with less repression, but in addition, strengthened ties with the population actually generates more transmission of information liable to foster better targeted, more efficient repression. Conversely, law-and-order policing is often confined to indiscriminate mass control operations, yielding meager results in terms of the cost/efficiency ratio. In this view, control and safety are not linked, they may even be contradictory, when it

reaches the point where the police frighten the citizens they are supposed to protect.

In other words, actual practices show that the idea of the community policing model is not to impose preventive, “nice” policing to the detriment of a strong, repressive police force, but rather, to replace mass policing based on control and quantitative productivity by a well-informed police force integrated in the community, and whose action, specifically targeted, is approved and abetted by local people. In the latter case, the price to be paid by the officer is of course that of playing a particular social role, of being attentive, at the least, and at best of relaying and coping with the problems brought up by citizens.

Refusal of this sort of policing, including the very principle, is counterproductive in the medium term, as the many officers who are calling for a revival of the community strategy<sup>13</sup> have come to realize. It also reveals a refusal of dialogue, negotiations, and attentiveness to the population, which must merely be controlled, protected, or punished. In this context, citizens only exist as victims or offenders, never as partners and even less in the driver’s seat.

Paradoxically, then, I note that whereas the police increasingly adopts military strategies for controlling the most exposed sectors, to the point of using wartime material such as drones,<sup>14</sup> it neglects to adopt one feature on which the French army prides itself in comparison with other, more powerful armed forces, which is its good contacts with civilians, including on enemy territory.

## THE NUMBERS GAME AS SOLUTION, AND ITS PERVERSE EFFECTS

Order-maintenance policing, or control, is not only expressed through decisions about the strength of police forces. The way officers' actions are evaluated also reveals the shift under way. Figures for offending and rates of case elucidation are imposed as the essential, perhaps the exclusive, criteria for assessing the activity of the police forces. Here too, there is nothing new about these practices, inherited from the 1980s and '90s, and never completely abandoned. But there is a definite accentuation of the "numbers effect" and of its failings.

This numbers game is depicted as a new way of managing the police, using allegedly modern managerial tools for evaluation, with its "culture of delivering the goods."<sup>15</sup> The novelty of this type of management, actually a setback to the very old-fashioned Taylorist model, is quite debatable. In terms of management of sections, these tools were welcomed at first, because they entered into familiar frames of reference that the officers knew how to handle.<sup>16</sup> "Producing" the right figures, the ones their hierarchy wants to see, is nothing new for police officers. They were not alarmed, then, when Sarkozy offered better pay and material conditions in exchange for good results that could be flaunted in the media. The good numbers, spread by the publicity machine of marveling mass-media and technocrats, certainly helped "construct" the image of the minister as a "winner," particularly since much of the population and many journalists had tired of having the safety issue occupy such a large place in public debate and later worried about its consequences on the 2002 presidential election.

Grass roots police officers were content at first, but then disenchantment ensued, followed by concern about the inconsiderate amount of work involved in this statistics-producing activity. Whereas in the past, once they had filled out the forms showing their productivity, their aptitude for producing good figures left them with the time they needed to do what they felt was their “real” police work—investigations for some, but also, for others, contact with the population—they were now caught up in a spiraling inflation leaving them increasingly less room for initiatives. Producing the right figures requires more and more of their time, and infringes all the more on the time for doing their job intelligently. For example, instead of tracing drug networks up to the top, which takes quite a while but yields some real results, officers are encouraged to take in large numbers of consumers and petty dealers.

So a vicious circle develops: the more the police relies on mass control strategies aimed at meeting its quotas, the less time it has to establish contacts with citizens, who in turn get tired, then irritated, by these shows of force, as oppressive as they are useless in terms of improved public safety. At that point, not only are citizens less inclined to cooperate with the police, viewed as instruments of constraint rather than as a solution to their problems, but in addition, since the latter have increasingly less time and information, the police tend to lean increasingly on that type of activity at the expense of more “intelligent” action. Law-and-order policing and control are reinforced, at the expense of both citizens and police officers themselves.

Because the police are trapped. For them, the discourse on restoring law and order collides with the harsh realities of field

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work. Now acquainted with fewer people, ordered to do more mass operations and checks of all sorts, and led to resort to ineffectual, ridiculous tricks to bring their figures up, they encounter growing hostility and constant aggression. The law-and-order policy has alienated them from a large portion of the population, the people on whom they focus, but also those who do not see much improvement in their situation, be it with respect to safety or to their other expectations. For those people, the police are at best a useless foreign body, at worst an enemy.

This produces constant tension and violence, embryonic or outspoken, which both sides have difficulty in containing most of the time. Dialogue, negotiation, and informal arrangements around safety issues are replaced by relations based on power struggles, the greatest beneficiary of which is the president, who can claim to be the only solution to a situation that he himself has encouraged, deliberately or not. Irrespective of one's opinion on community policing, it must be admitted that it had the advantage of attempting to provide a solution other than confrontation to the problems in sensitive areas.

At present, there is no hope of improvement on the horizon. Instead of trying to overcome the frictions and imposing themselves as a regulatory force in those neighborhoods, the police, using prevention, dissuasion, and force, have focused on constraint and control—against the will of most officers—and has now become a factor contributing to the crisis and exacerbating the tension.<sup>17</sup> The only way out conceived by the present administration is a head-forward pursuit of ever more technology, with increasing numbers of video surveillance cameras, tools for control of all sorts, helicopters, and drones, as

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though they could effectively replace the absence of human contact.

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NOTES

- 1 C. Mouhanna, *Quel service pour quel Public? Une tentative d'évaluation chiffrée de l'image de la Police dans la population face à la territorialisation*, CSO-IHESI, July 2000.
- 2 Apparently this episode had been cleverly staged, orchestrated so as to “trap” local police officers, as revealed by the departmental Director of public security of the time. See [www.rue89.com/2007/12/21/toulouse-a-la-retraite-le-flic-de-gauche-se-lache-contre-sarkozy](http://www.rue89.com/2007/12/21/toulouse-a-la-retraite-le-flic-de-gauche-se-lache-contre-sarkozy). See also [www.bakchich.info/article2105.html](http://www.bakchich.info/article2105.html)
- 3 S. Roché, *Police de proximité. Nos politiques de sécurité* (Paris: Seuil, 2005).
- 4 See, for example, the report by the Senatorial joint information mission headed by Alex Turk on the November 2005 riots, “Politiques conduites envers les quartiers en difficulté depuis le début des années 1990 : Bilans et perspectives,” written by Pierre André, UMP [the president’s party] senator from the Aisne département.
- 5 Michèle Alliot-Marie, in a speech at the INHES on January 14, 2008.
- 6 Conservative Minister of the Interior from 1986 to 1988 and from 1993 to 1995.
- 7 J. Ferret, C. Mouhanna, *Peurs sur les villes : vers un populisme punitif à la française?* (Paris: PUF, 2005).
- 8 C. Mouhanna, “*Police et justice face au citoyen : le repli bureaucratique*” (Paris: Sciences-Po, 2005).
- 9 A “discrete” police service in charge of the discrete surveillance of political activities and the suburbs.
- 10 D. Monjardet, *Ce que fait la police. Sociologie de la force publique* (Paris: La Découverte, Paris, 1996).
- 11 The CRS and *compagnies d'intervention* are police sections in charge of dealing with demonstrations and riots.
- 12 See, for example, J. Eck, “Why don’t Problems Get Solved?” in W. Skogan (ed.), *Community Policing. Can it Work?* (Belmont: Thomson Wadworth, 2004).

- 13 See the statements of the police officers' unions—the Syndicat national des officiers de police (SNOP) and Union nationale des syndicats autonomes (UNSA)-Police—the largest unions in their respective sections.
- 14 See Mathieu Rigouste's contribution to this book.
- 15 See Laurent Mucchielli's contribution to this book.
- 16 J.-H. Matelly, C. Mouhanna, *Police, des chiffres et des doutes* (Paris: Michalon, 2007).
- 17 M. Mohammed, L. Mucchielli, "La police dans les 'quartiers sensibles' : un profond malaise," in L. Mucchielli, V. Le Goaziou (eds.), *Quand les banlieues brûlent... Retour sur les émeutes de novembre 2005* (Paris: La Découverte, 2d ed., 2007); C. Mouhanna, "Les services publics et la question jeune : de la crainte au rejet?," in F. Bailleau, C. Gorgeon (eds.), *Prévention et sécurité : vers un nouvel ordre social ?* (Éditions de la DIV, 2000).