

International Policing

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Managing Editor
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Art Director
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Features

Focus on International Policing

The Pacific Training Initiative

By Thomas J. Baker

1

The Pacific Training Initiative fosters increased cooperation between law enforcement agencies of Pacific island nations and the United States.

International Police Training

By Roger Yochelson

6

ICITAP seeks to strengthen the rule of law in developing democracies.

141833

Reflections on British Policing

By Kevin M. Courtney

20

Members of an American police agency learn firsthand about British law enforcement.

HITS: Catching Criminals in the Northwest

By Robert D. Keppel
and Joseph G. Weis

14

A State database helps investigators to solve violent crimes.

141834

Undercover Investigations and the Entrapment Defense

By Thomas V. Kukura

27

Undercover investigations should not give rise to entrapment claims and related defenses.

141835

Departments

4 Police Policy
Drug Testing

22 Sound Off
SWAT

12 Police Practices
Lifesaving Procedure

26 Bulletin Reports

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APR 15 1993

The International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program

By
ROGER YOCHELSON



On a hot, humid day in 1985, two men in an old sedan drive up to a small grocery in a Central American country. The driver waits in the car, while the other man walks into the store. Brandishing a handgun, he takes the money from the till, shoots the cashier in the neck and chest, and walks out to the street, where the busy foot traffic barely slows as he gets into the car and is driven away.

Because the store is on the outskirts of the city, homicide investigators take 40 minutes to arrive by bus. Meanwhile, the scene is overrun by curious citizens, journalists, volunteer firemen from competing companies vying for the bonus they

receive for delivering bodies to particular funeral homes, and the uniform patrolmen from that area.

When investigators finally arrive, they arrange for everyone present on the street and in the store at the time of the crime to be taken in for questioning. They conduct no preliminary interviews at the scene to determine whether the citizens to be questioned actually have any potential use or relevance.

Police personnel make no effort to preserve the crime scene or to collect and protect physical evidence. Within a week, investigators close the cursory investigation. They file a report and send it to the prosecutors and the court, where it

will either die under the crushing backlog of files or be dismissed for lack of evidence.

Seven years later, criminals commit a nearly identical crime. This time, however, the uniform beat officers arrive immediately, cordon off the area, and ask potential witnesses preliminary questions. Homicide investigators travel to the remote area in one of several new police vehicles, with crime scene kits in hand. The judge responsible for overseeing the investigative phase of the case arrives a short time later. The police collect and tag evidence. They also complete detailed drawings and descriptions of the crime scene. That same

day, investigators run a partial license plate number through a new records system and contact the National Insurance Crime Bureau (NICB) in the United States.

After several weeks of analyzing evidence and other information, the investigators identify two suspects. During subsequent warranted searches, the police retrieve what appear to be bloodstained clothes from the residence of one of the suspects. The crime lab, staffed with trained serologists, gets a positive match. With this evidence and corroborating witness testimony, police arrest the two suspects.

Followup investigations ordered by the judge tie the men to the 1985 grocery store robbery. Both men are convicted of robbery and first-degree murder, largely on the basis of the forensic evidence gathered. The same judge who presided over the 1985 investigation tries this case and compliments the police for the thoroughness of their work. What happened in the intervening years between these two cases is the story of the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program.

BACKGROUND

In 1986, Congress established the International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) to enhance investigative capabilities in democracies throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. ICITAP operates under the authority of the Deputy Attorney General of the United States and is fully funded by the Department of State through yearly grants from the Administration of Justice Programs. Congress authorized

ICITAP for three primary reasons: To enhance the professional capabilities of Latin American and Caribbean law enforcement agencies to carry out investigative and forensic functions; to assist in the development of academic instruction for criminal justice personnel; and to improve the administrative and management abilities of law enforcement agencies, especially those relating to career development, personnel evaluation, and internal discipline procedures.

Special Assistance

ICITAP also operates under the authority of the Urgent Assistance for Democracy in Panama Act of 1990, which was designed to provide training in civilian law enforcement techniques for the police forces of Panama. This expanded authority allows for enhanced efforts in Panama, whose criminal justice system required almost com-

plete rebuilding after the ouster of Panama's president in 1989.

Additionally, ICITAP provides specialized training and assistance under its Colombian Judicial Protection Program, which began in August 1989 with funding authorized in the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. Additional funding exists for assistance to Bolivia, Colombia, and Peru—authorized under the International Narcotics Control Act of 1990. Congress is currently considering legislation that would expand the work of ICITAP into other countries in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Training

Since beginning work in 1986, ICITAP has provided approximately 20,000 student-weeks of training to 10,000 students. ICITAP instructors offer courses on such divergent topics as investigative techniques, general criminal investigations, violent personal crimes,

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Mr. Yochelson, formerly the project design manager for ICITAP, now heads the Office of Public Administration for the Agency for International Development mission in Panama.

Countries That Receive ICITAP Training

- Anguilla
- Antigua & Barbuda
- Bahamas
- Barbados
- Belize
- Bolivia
- British Virgin Islands
- Cayman Islands
- Colombia
- Costa Rica
- Dominica
- Dominican Republic
- El Salvador
- Grenada
- Guatemala
- Guyana
- Honduras
- Jamaica
- Montserrat
- Nicaragua
- Panama
- Peru
- St. Kitts
- St. Lucia
- St. Vincent & The Grenadines
- Trinidad & Tobago
- Turks & Caicos
- Uruguay

and police management, as well as other more specialized training seminars for judges and prosecutors.

For the most part, ICITAP training emphasizes the rule of law and internationally recognized human rights standards. Limitations, however, do exist on ICITAP activity. ICITAP cannot provide lethal equipment or assistance related to enforcement techniques, such as arrest procedures, use of force, or patrol and traffic procedures.

Staffing and Direct Assistance

Staffing for ICITAP actually began in 1985 with the assignment of a supervisory special agent from the FBI as director for the office. An official who served overseas with the Agency for International Development was appointed as deputy director. Other early staff included additional FBI agents detailed to ICITAP and Department of Justice (DOJ) personnel. Since that time, the office has grown to include former DEA and Secret Service personnel, as well as professionals from a variety of other backgrounds.

Since the inception of the ICITAP concept, DOJ support has helped the program in a variety of ways. From participation by the highest executives of the FBI at conferences and other functions to the sponsorship of specific training and assistance in critical logistical efforts, DOJ and FBI association with ICITAP lent credibility and expertise to its mission.

In addition, the FBI continues to provide important direct support to the work of the office. This includes not only the agents on detail but also assistance with training programs and sharing of other resources, including facilities at

the FBI Academy in Quantico, Virginia.

IMPROVING CAPABILITIES

ICITAP represents the most concerted effort by the United States to aid the development of law enforcement capabilities in the Western Hemisphere. This is accomplished primarily through enhancing civilian policing skills, management assistance, academy development, regional and national dialogue among criminal justice agencies, and specific training programs.

Additionally, ICITAP provides various other types of aid, such as national and regional courses to police personnel, judges, and prosecutors in investigative techniques, management, and executive-level skills. Forensic science also represents an important element of ICITAP's efforts, and countries receive a significant degree of assistance through training seminars, donated equipment, and intern programs.

ICITAP directs its assistance primarily to police agencies, but significant work takes place with judges and prosecutors, as well. ICITAP also focuses on the relationship between the police and other criminal justice entities and supports various efforts to foster greater coordination through special courses and joint conferences. Specific initiatives include the creation of an Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) in both the Guatemalan and Panamanian National Police and the first phase of the development of an OPR within the National Security Forces (police) of Honduras.


In Jamaica and Barbados, ICITAP works with local authorities to assist them in gaining accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies, Inc. (CALEA), which developed a set of internationally recognized standards for law enforcement agencies. Both countries also receive substantial assistance intended to enhance the quality of training provided in their respective police academies. Both of these undertakings serve as models for other countries in the Caribbean.

BENEFITS

ICITAP assistance reflects a synthesis of the considerable evolution that has taken place in American crime prevention and law enforcement over the years. The numerous benefits of the ICITAP Program redound both to the foreign recipients and to U.S. law enforcement.

Police techniques, training, management practices, organization, policies and procedures, and technology changed dramatically in the United States during the last 25 years. Underlying all of these changes, however, are the laws that provide proper authority to law enforcement while preserving fundamental rights for all citizens. Through its courses, conferences, and other activities, ICITAP attempts to move foreign law enforcement officials forward toward these evolved methodologies and technologies at an accelerated rate.

In most cases, however, the state of affairs in recipient countries is 15 to 50 years behind those in the United States. Many agencies employ antiquated methods and



“ICITAP relies on a positive exchange between recipient countries and American law enforcement agencies at various levels.”

equipment. For the most part, procedures have not been modernized since the days when the Kennedy administration provided training and materials.

In countries where these conditions exist, ICITAP training concentrates on the basics of sound investigation and prosecution. In countries with more advanced criminal justice systems, ICITAP provides counseling in such areas as protection strategies for judges and others under threat, management skills, threat assessments, and forensic techniques.

Benefits are often hard to measure in such long-term efforts. But tangible positive results have already been realized. In many cases, prosecutors succeed in winning convictions where defendants would previously have been released. Often, in these cases, judges and police cite ICITAP training as the reason for more thorough prosecutions.

Agencies also develop attitudes essential to modern policing. Some senior foreign law enforcement offi-

cial formed regional, multinational networks after they met initially in ICITAP courses and conferences. This type of regional cooperation rarely existed before ICITAP training began.

The cooperative effort derives return benefits for the United States as well. ICITAP has drawn on the talent and personnel of various American Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies, which participate by hosting internships, providing hands-on training overseas, and sharing information domestically through conferences and seminars. American agencies also establish potentially useful contacts with foreign agencies that may become involved in international cases. And, the enhanced abilities in recipient countries make them better able to assist in investigating increasing multinational criminal activity.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Of course, ICITAP must overcome formidable obstacles. In a number of Latin American coun-

tries, police recruits possess little more than a ninth grade education. In many cases, the culture reflects a long history of frequent changes in government, shifting control by a variety of power groups, and frail economies. Opportunities for advancement have often been difficult to find, and guarantees of income or position are rare.

On the average, police officers in Latin America subsist on meager salaries, which partly results in low-level police corruption that citizens have come to accept. Superiors rarely exert any pressure on subordinates to perform well. Job security is almost nonexistent. Agencies offer little, if any, protection related to promotion or benefits. Therefore, few incentives exist for officers to perform professionally, and in fact, there are a number of disincentives to being thorough and conscientious.

The Caribbean suffers from a similar situation. The average recruit's educational and socialization level lags far behind those of their U.S. counterparts. Accordingly, some recruit programs must spend considerable time on basic secular education subjects.

Typically, Caribbean police officers hold second jobs to make ends meet. Housing is available for some police personnel, but conditions are deplorable. Salaries for Caribbean officers are generally higher than for Latin American police, with those in stronger economies earning about \$800 per month. With funding shortfalls, inconsistent messages from managers, inadequate facilities, and variable political will for change, reformers—both inside and outside these countries—face an

enormous challenge to help develop stronger police processes and institutions.

THE FUTURE

ICITAP has long-range goals throughout the hemisphere for improving the overall effectiveness of the various criminal justice systems. Administrators plan to accomplish

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these goals through improving skills, strengthening institutions, and changing attitudes that inhibit good policing.

As more retired and active duty American law enforcement officers become involved with ICITAP, they develop an increased appreciation for conditions in the United States. The generosity of American agencies continues to grow, with an increasing number of offers supporting internships and providing instruction and other assistance.

For the United States, the effort to create more professional criminal justice systems in Latin America and the Caribbean remains a key component in the overall goal to protect established democratic principles and develop stronger democratic institutions throughout the

Western Hemisphere. In fact, the United States accomplishes this through a variety of programs, including the FBI's National Academy, as well as training and assistance programs provided by other U.S. agencies. But ICITAP represents the largest and most concerted effort in this area.

If the work to date is any indication, ICITAP will have a tremendous impact in improving treatment of witnesses and suspects, increasing the skill levels of investigators, and limiting the indiscriminate use of force and authority in Latin American and Caribbean police agencies. Instead, these agencies will focus on modern investigative procedures, accountability, management practices, use of forensic skills and physical evidence, and maintaining a sense of purpose and credibility.

CONCLUSION

While much remains to be done, ICITAP establishes the basic groundwork for change. The key to success, however, is providing participating nations with the means to sustain and foster enhanced criminal justice practices and procedures.

ICITAP relies on a positive exchange between recipient countries and American law enforcement agencies at various levels. These agencies share with their foreign counterparts both the successes and frustrations experienced in American policing and criminal justice. For, despite well-publicized problems, the American criminal justice system remains a widely praised and sought after model for emerging democracies throughout the world. ♦