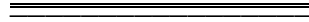
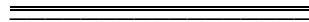


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



Rationalization of a Regional SWAT Team



**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



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ABSTRACT

Most small to medium sized agencies are hard pressed to have the personnel to cover their shifts much less having a special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team. Cities also have budgetary, training, and equipment constraints as well. But law enforcement officers and executives have a duty to do everything in their power to protect their citizens. Society expects their police agency to be trained and equipped and ready to handle any situation that occurs in a timely manner. Police administrators must think outside the box and come to the realization that due to their department's size, budget constraints, equipment issues, and training, they may need assistance to be that complete police service that the community believes they are. Law enforcement agencies should consider being part of a regional SWAT Team.

One way of doing this is by combining resources with surrounding agencies. They share equipment, manpower, trainers, knowledge, and experiences that each agency will bring to the team. This cuts down on costs, equipment issues, training issues, and manpower issues. Also, having a well thought out and written Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), department heads that have already been involved with the selection process of their SWAT commander know up front what type of control they have over the team while in their jurisdiction. The transition to a multi-jurisdictional team is much smoother and less confrontational when all of the issues have been discussed and written out prior to implementing the team. Being a part of a multi-jurisdictional/Regional SWAT team is achievable even for a small to medium-sized agencies. This gives superior service to the communities they serve.

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INTRODUCTION

Most agencies are unable to maintain the manpower to sustain an adequately-sized special weapons and tactics (SWAT) team. Teaming up with other agencies assists with budgetary constraints for training and equipment, thus making the officers better-equipped to handle high-risk situations, which makes the communities they serve a safer place. Law enforcement officers and executives have a duty to do all that is possible to protect citizens. Just some of the ways of doing that are by manpower, training, and education, etc. Law enforcement agencies (LEA) are always searching for ways to maintain a superior level of service to the communities in which they serve, while addressing the never-ending budgetary limitations (Morrison, 2013). Having to work within budgetary constraints is nothing new, but a progressive agency must continue to be prepared for that event that no one wants to happen in their community. With that being said, LEAs have to prepare for the worst and have a plan of action that is going to involve the SWAT team, which some like to refer to as the “necessary evil”.

Partin (2017) states that “Communities, regardless of their size, are not immune from violence and critical incidents, and police agencies nationwide must be prepared and equipped to provide an effective tactical response” (p.1). One example of this recently occurred in Sutherland Springs, Texas, which is a very small town, population approximately 600. Twenty-six were killed and 20 were injured. A town and/or county of this size may not have the manpower, equipment, or training to maintain a specialized unit, but if agencies could put aside differences and band together, each could have a regional or multi-jurisdictional SWAT team to limit the out-of-pocket expenses for training, equipment, manpower, etc.

When agencies pool their resources, the cost is spread out, thus becoming a more viable and affordable option for departments (Berkowitz, 2015). By doing this, departments can combine manpower and have fewer officers needing off at one time for training, which keeps more officers on the street. When it comes to training, one needs to have more instructors available that teach different areas of expertise, which also saves on bringing in outside instructors, which in part saves money in training. Agencies can also pool their resources together. Each agency may have a separate piece of equipment that would complement the other but it does not do much for that individual agency on its own.

A SWAT team is a supplemental asset or another tool in that administrator's tool belt to fight crime and be an advocate for the community. Officers must also have the tools to protect themselves and the citizens they serve and be prepared for worst-case scenarios (Marcou, 2014). LEAs should consider being part of a regional SWAT team.

POSITION

Combining resources for departments is imperative for the small to midsize police department that is struggling with manpower and equipment. A good place to start, especially for small to mid-sized agencies, is combining functions such as communication centers, jails, and tactical teams (Bedillion, 2016). One example is the agreement between the cities of Carrollton, Farmers Branch, and Addison. They have signed an agreement for a combined dispatch center. This was a cost savings for the agencies. Due to combining, they were able to cut ten positions, which was a cost savings on the part of the three cities (Bedillion, 2016). This was done to save money

and increase their capabilities. It also decreased each agency's manpower that was needed.

A combined SWAT team in South Chicago that comprises 34 governmental agencies has been a successful multi-jurisdictional team (Kwiatkowski, 2010). This team consists of 64 operators, 7 medics, and 4 crisis negotiators. According to Twohey (2000), another successful team is the combined team of Ogden/Metro SWAT team in Utah. It consists of 22 officers from 17 jurisdictions with six technicians (Morrison, 2013). Green (2001) states that a SWAT team needs approximately 21 officers in order to confront a critical incident (as cited in Morrison, 2013). By combining resources, these teams have better use of manpower, have a larger team, and are better equipped. The collective resources that each of these agencies bring to the team is greater than the any single agency could ever have at their respective departments (Morrison, 2013)

One agency could have a state of the art command vehicle, another may have modern hostage negotiating equipment, another may have an armored vehicle and still another may have explosive entry equipment (Bedillion, 2016). When multiple agencies agree to a memorandum of understanding (MOU) stating that they will give a certain number of personnel to the team, as well as equipment already obtained individually, it increases the size of the team way past the point that any one agency could ever comprehend.

This also places well-trained and equipped officers on the streets doing their regular jobs. These officers will become a department's first responder in many instances who have been specially trained to handle certain situations, and which will

be an added factor of having tactically trained SWAT personnel immediately available or nearby at the time of a critical incident (Vitacco, 2014). These highly skilled men and women have confidence in themselves, which also instills confidence in the officers around them that the situation will be contained and managed appropriately until the full-time team arrives.

According to Green (2001), a common number needed to maintain a SWAT team has been researched and is stated to be 21 officers in order to maintain and confront a critical incident (Morrison, 2013). The National Tactical Officer's Association, (NTOA) states that it takes a minimum of 17 operators to be successful and be a properly functioning SWAT team (NTOA, 2015). But this is a bare bones team. To have a well-rounded and self-sufficient team, hostage negotiators and tactical medics need to be considered as well.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

Many agency administrators may say, 'I do not need to spend money on a SWAT team when we can utilize a larger agency who already has the resources.' Smaller agencies near larger urban areas may call out, for example, the Houston Police Department, the Dallas Police Department, or the San Antonio Police Department. Similarly, a smaller agency in a rural area may call out the Texas Department of Public Safety or local sheriff's office tactical team.

At the same time, though, these same agency administrators feel out of control of the situation when an outside agency comes in and takes over their scene in their city. But when a group of agencies combine and the department heads have committed a couple of operators to the team and have participated in the selection process of the

SWAT Commander, they will feel that they have buy-in in the team and will feel more comfortable with the team. If this process has occurred and they have some type of working relationship and have been part of the selection process, then they should feel more comfortable around them and should begin to learn and build confidence by seeing the same faces and working through problems with each other. Combining resources with other agencies is imperative to being prepared for any threats that may come about. Agency administrators have to put aside their differences and come together to have this highly trained unit at their disposal to quickly engage and eliminate any deadly threats (Reynolds, 2009).

A way to solve the issue of not feeling in control is by having all agencies be part of an MOU or memorandum of understanding. Some call it an inter-local agreement. This assists the participating agencies in seeing what type of control they have over their personnel, the resources, budgetary issues, worker's compensation issues, overtime, training, etc. If it is all written out and discussed prior to issues coming up, then the transition is much smoother and less confrontational to all involved. Maintaining control of their personnel and resources assigned to the regional team is defined in the Texas Government Code through an interlocal agreement. (Intergovernmental Relations, 1997). A sample of the National Tactical Officers Association, NTOA, shows how to incorporate in an agency's interlocal agreement or MOU stipulating that the incident commander or head of the department involved is over the multi-jurisdictional team and its equipment while in their respective jurisdiction (NTOA, 2015).

Another issue that is at the top of every administrator's mind is 'Who will lead the team? Which person will be the one to protect my agency, my city, and me personally from litigation?' With having multiple agencies involved, this could be a complicated matter. But on the flip side, it can also work in the best interest of each agency. The more agencies involved, the better the pool of applicants that may fit this role. But this important position must be scrutinized and chosen by each agency. There should be a process in which each agency has a say in the selection of the SWAT commander. This should be done in a formal setting by resume and interview of all chiefs/sheriffs involved. The selected SWAT commander will command all elements of the multi-jurisdictional team (Green, 2001). This person maintains all training records. He or she serves as a liaison and will need to be available to all administrators involved. The person chosen for this role has command authority over all team members regardless of their rank and/or title from their respective agency. The agreement should be very specific and have a clear delineation of the command structure and authority. When these issues are discussed at the beginning and administrators have a clear understanding, the team can function as a unified entity (Vitacco, 2014). A benefit to having a well written MOU and a multi-jurisdictional team is the fact that all agencies know in advance that the requesting agency's appointed incident commander is in command and should always be on scene (Berkowitz, 2015).

A third issue that is always in the forefront of administrators and cities are the funds. A specialized unit such a SWAT team will require a budget line item for itself due to equipment and training. So, by combining resources, this will cut down on cost immensely (Reynolds, 2009). Even though there are budget limitations, "Law

Enforcement Agencies still have... to maintain an adequate level of service to their respective communities” (Morrison, 2013, p.1). Morrison (2013) states that “SWAT teams require expensive equipment, training, and personnel costs that could easily eat into a department’s budget, especially in small and midsize agencies. Multi-jurisdictional SWAT teams can mollify budget woes by distributing the costs associated with SWAT teams among multiple agencies” (p. 1). This can be done through grants, like the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) grant and the 1033 Military Excess Property Program through the government. The UASI grant focuses more on high-threat, high-density urban areas. Eligible candidates for the FY2015 UASI program were determined through an analysis of relative risk of terrorism faced by the one hundred most populous metropolitan statistical areas in the United States, in accordance with the 9/11 Act. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, in 2014, the total funding was \$587,000,000; in 2015, total funding was \$587,000,000; in 2016, total funding was \$580,000,000; and in 2017, the total funding was \$580,000,000.

According to the Nevada Department of Public Safety Office of Criminal Justice (n.d.), “The 1033 Program enables Law Enforcement Agencies to screen and obtain excess property from the Department of Defense. Authorized screeners can search the LESO’s website for equipment that is available worldwide. The only costs involved acquiring equipment are pick-up or shipping costs.” All an agency must do to participate is send a letter to the Office of Criminal Justice (OCJA) and sign an Interlocal Agreement with OCJA to be a part of the program.

RECOMMENDATION

Police agencies must do everything in their power to protect their citizens from the criminal element. Communities have the expectation of complete police service of every kind. The police cannot fail. Police administrators must think outside the box and come to the realization that depending on their department size, budget constraints, equipment issues, training or lack thereof, they may need assistance to be that complete police service that the community believes are. Police agencies must be equipped and trained for an effective tactical response. One way of doing this is combining resources with surrounding agencies. Most police agencies in Texas are small to medium sized and are usually underfunded when it comes to manning and maintaining a self-sustaining SWAT team. Cities that do not have a SWAT team should consider being a part of a regional SWAT team.

This is not always easy to do, but there are many examples out there to show that it can be done and be done exceptionally well. One example is the multi-jurisdictional team in South Chicago that encompasses 34 departments. Another is the Ogden/Metro SWAT team that has 17 jurisdictions and over 22 officers as operators. These two are just a few of the many. They are more successful due to combining resources. By combining resources, these teams have a better use of manpower, have a larger team, and are better equipped (Morrison, 2013).

When departments send a few of their officers to be a part of a multi-jurisdictional or regional team, the officers are better trained, well-equipped, and better prepared for an incident while doing their regular assigned duties. This gives them and the officers

they work with confidence that there is a tactical operator on the street and readily available when a situation occurs.

Agency administrators that feel that they will not have control if they are a part of a multi-jurisdictional team need to understand that having a memorandum of understanding or interlocal agreement stipulating the terms will help reduce their uncertainty. These agreements cannot be vague and should be agreed upon by all agency administrators. The agreement should be very specific and have a clear delineation of the command structure and authority. When these issues are discussed at the beginning and administrators have a clear understanding, the team can function as a unified entity (Vitacco, 2014). All administrators should understand and agree that the agency where the incident is occurring has complete command of the scene, the team, and its resources. When all issues have been discussed, the transition is much smoother and less confrontational to all involved.

When having multiple agencies involved, there has must be clear leadership of the team. This person is usually called the SWAT Commander. This person is the liaison between all department heads of each city. Sometimes chiefs/sheriffs call a SWAT team a "necessary evil". When an agency has a unit equipped the way a SWAT team is, the person in charge needs to be able to see the big picture of each agency to reduce the amount of liability as much as possible. This person has complete authority of all members of the team regardless of any operators' rank and/or title that they hold at their respective agency. The SWAT commander should go through a rigorous selection process, attended by all department heads involved on the team, and the decision should be a unanimous one.

Of course, the “bottom line” must be discussed when attempting to start or be a part of a new program. SWAT teams require a larger monetary investment for start-up and sustainment. Costs would be very prohibitive for an individual agency, but by combining jurisdictions, the cost is spread over many communities and becomes more affordable for all involved. Having the desired SWAT team “requires expensive equipment, training, and personnel costs that could easily eat into a department’s budget” (Morrison, 2013, p.1). So, combining to be a part of a multi-jurisdictional SWAT team not only eases personnel issues, it can also ease the need for resources. One agency could have a command vehicle, another may have hostage negotiation equipment, another may have an armored vehicle, and another may have explosive breaching capabilities (Bedillion, 2016). Combining high-cost equipment of this nature saves the cities involved thousands of dollars, giving them the opportunity to have and participate in a SWAT Team.

When contemplating being involved in a joint SWAT team, there are also other avenues to explore when it comes to equipment. The Urban Areas Security Initiative, (UASI) grant focuses on more high-threat, high density urban areas. If an agency is in a highly populated area near a large city and is are a part of a multi-jurisdictional team and can be a regional asset, that city can possibly submit requests to receive all types of equipment and training funds. Departments can also receive equipment through the 1033 Military Excess Property Program. This program assists any department with obtaining any type of military issued equipment that is no longer being used. This equipment can be uniforms, boots, night vision, lasers, armored vehicles, etc.

To be a part of a multi-jurisdictional/regional SWAT team is achievable. It should not be jumped into without a lot of consideration and thought, but it can be done and is not out of reach for those agencies that do not currently have a SWAT team. All agencies, especially the smaller to medium-sized ones, are able to be a part of an outstanding multi-jurisdictional or regional SWAT team giving superior service to the communities they serve.

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