The New Crisis in Policing: Is It Time To Reconsider Police Consolidation and To Look to Lessons from The European Experience

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Abstract: *Following recent events in local policing in the US leading to civil unrest in a number of cities there is reason to fear a crisis in local law enforcement, to the extent of reducing police effectiveness and even leading to increases in crime. With concerns about a militarized police, excessive use of deadly force, and growing racially focused mistrust of police, the time to relook police organization and professionalism may once again be at hand. Decentralized policing and local control may return to the center of the debate. The effectiveness of a decentralized approach to local policing and the resultant debate about police consolidation has been simmering in the United States since the 1931 Wickersham Commission's criticism of the fragmented approach. The literature related to consolidation and its impact on effectiveness is replete with contradictions, but while police effectiveness continues to be an important focus, that perspective has expanded to be considerably not only more about the need for fiscal responsibility, but especially about the role of police, reexamining use of force questions, and the militarization of police in America. This paper examines the current state of the debate and supports Nelligan and Bourns' (2011) argument for an intensive new research effort to resolve the effectiveness and fiscal questions, but also uses the post-World War II events in Germany as a comparative way to reexamine a more centralized approach to policing as a way to seek not only fiscal advantages, but to focus on police professionalization.*

Keywords: Police Consolidation, Decentralized Policing

Introduction

The search for the most professional police and the best organizational model to ensure that end, has been underway in developed nations for much of modern history, with a divergence between nations relying on a very localized and decentralized structure versus the more centralized model at regional, state or even national level. While a number of nations besides the United States, especially in Western Europe, tried the decentralized model voluntarily or through imposition, almost uniformly have moved to a centralized model. In the United states there have been some sporadic efforts toward consolidation, but the political reality of the local control model and of state based legal systems has precluded any concerted effort toward that end.

Unfortunately, American police organizations have at times struggled for acceptance and trust by their served communities, leading to efforts at professionalization by pushing higher education, by imposition of state based police standards and training, by professional accreditation of police departments by and by seeking better community relations through efforts such as community policing. Despite all of these efforts, policing in the United States is once again in crisis. While working to deal with the financial exigencies of recent years, police agencies also have been forced to try to justify the new militarization, while also dealing with significant civil unrest and turmoil because of perceived overreach in the use of force, including deadly force, especially in dealings with the African American community. This new mistrust, has even been blamed for calls for killing police officers and the execution style slayings of some police officers in retaliation.

The current situation certainly suggests policing in the U.S. is once again in crisis, and a new search for the way forward to improve professionalization of police and rebuilding or increasing citizen trust of police is sorely needed. One element of that search must clearly be to look at the organization and role of police in American communities, and looking at the experiences of other developed western nations is one logical approach moving forward. It is the purpose of this paper therefore to review various issues facing policing in the US and to look to European democracies for possible lessons learned.

Policing and the Military Model

Throughout the world, hierarchical military structure has influenced police organizations, resulting in police departments being much like military units. The American example, however, presents significant differences. While the armed forces of the United States are divided into four major segments, or five including the Coast Guard, those segments, make up a single force, centralized at the national level. The military services are designed to complement one another and to seek a common goal—the defense of the country. Competing interests do exist between branches of the military, as do occasional lapses in cooperation, but the effort to achieve the common goal has continued.

Maintaining a separate military force in each local community seems ludicrous and would make coordinated military action difficult, if not impossible. The very system that seems ludicrous for the military is the one embraced by the police for their war on crime—a crime war with national and international implications. Police departments may have a common goal, but because of their fragmentation, resulting from the continuing desire for local control, cooperation can be limited and centralization is a contradiction in terms when discussing the American police structure. The military style model is widespread throughout the World, with some western nations even utilizing a paramilitary national police model. Unfortunately, in the United States the term “military” in connection with policing has in and of itself become a political policy dilemma, with “militarization” of police through the use of military combat style uniforms and military vehicles and equipment becoming a flashpoint for criticizing police departments as they deal with civil unrest. This criticism comes at a time when police departments face the challenge of being able to respond to “lone wolf” or potentially even organized terror style attacks without looking to much like an occupying military force. Certainly the citizenry wants a police that can deal with such public safety threats, but they do not want the police to look like the Army—a challenging disconnect.

For the United States, the desire for local control of police may have had a noble beginning during the founding and growth of the nation, but with the crime rates of today, the time may be right to once again reexamine the further utility of that system, and German policing after World War II might offer an ideal model for comparison. The United States is not the only country with a totally decentralized police system, but it is certainly one of very few. Canada as an example may well be considered a decentralized model, but not to the extent of the U.S., and while there were others such as Belgium, European nations have over time moved to centralize police organizations. Belgium conducted a major reorganization in 2001 and reduced the number of local police departments from over two thousand to only 146, and its neighbor, the Netherlands, regionalized police to about 25 agencies. Of course, the fact that Belgium and the Netherlands each have a single legal system certainly made reorganization easier. Unlike the United States, most developed nations have at least a moderately centralized law enforcement structure. Even Great Britain, where the American system has its origin, has consolidated its formerly decentralized system. The obvious question then is what value do European countries see as the benefit of a more centralized policing model over a decentralized one.

Case Study: The German Police

Germany offers a particularly interesting example. After World War II, the occupying powers imposed in their zones of occupation police systems that resembled those in their own countries. Predictably, the Russians created the most centralized system. The French imposed a tightly controlled but more decentralized state police system, and the British a less rigid regional police structure. Only in the American occupation zone was a totally decentralized system installed, with small departments much like those in the United States. The victors' ideas did not last, and during the 1970s Germany completed consolidating its police agencies at the state level even to a great extent standardizing police uniforms and police vehicle marking except for state (Laender) identification. Obviously, the Germans are not concerned about maintaining any visible local identity.

The development of policing in Germany may well be traceable to the sixteenth century, but the rise of the powerful Prussian state, particularly under Frederick the Great, had the greatest impact on the inception and growth of what is now the modern German police service. The expansion of Prussia and the development of its system of law helped create a German police organizational tradition based on centralization at the state level. Police service was a convenient and natural transition for the great Prussian army. It was said that former noncommissioned officers of that army who survived their service with all their limbs would become police officers, while those who lost limbs would become teachers and other civil servants. The army's mustering out in essence became part of the basis for many of the Prussian civil service fields, a practice perhaps not unlike the veteran's preference programs in the United States today.

Although World War I spelled the end of the Prussian-controlled German Empire, the newly created republic nevertheless maintained a police system centralized at the state level. The postwar period saw the creation of the short-lived Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police), which was later replaced by the Bereitschaftspolizei (Emergency Police). These organizations were heavily armed, barracked, military-style organizations. The Bereitschaftspolizei became a natural target for later incorporation into the growing Third Reich's military after Hitler's rise to power. An emergency police under the original name still exists at the state level in Germany today, and those forces are again the primary training ground for new police officers.

Both Imperial Germany and the Weimar Republic relied on state-based police systems. However, during the Third Reich, Germany for the first time turned to a very centralized nationally controlled police system. Unfortunately, that system soon lost its professional character and became enmeshed in political enforcement. What had been traditional crime fighters numbering approximately 190,000 in 1931 grew to an internal security force of over two million at the height of World War II.

After World War II, the victorious Allies dismantled the political enforcement machinery and created police services modeled after their own police systems. The different German states for the first time developed completely different police organizational structures. The occupation zones of what was soon to become the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) included the U.S. Zone consisting of Bavaria, Hessen, Wuerttemberg-Baden, and Bremen; the British Zone consisting of Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westfalia, Schleswig-Holstein, and Hamburg; and the French Zone consisting of Rhineland-Palatinate, Wuerttemberg-Hohenzollern, and Baden. The occupiers merely copied their own policing systems, with the U.S. Military Government ordering the establishment of independent communal police agencies in cities with populations of five thousand or more. For police services outside of cities, the U.S. occupiers created a state-based Landpolizei or rural police in Bavaria, a Landespolizei or state police in Wuerttemberg-Baden, and a rural Gendarmerie in Hessen. The British, on the other hand, established regional police departments in their occupation zone, with independent communal police departments being emplaced only in cities with populations of 100,000 or more. Finally, the French established a highly centralized police hierarchy at the state level to provide police service in their occupation zone.

Of the three systems, the American-imposed communal police for even small cities was clearly the most radical departure from the long-standing German tradition. It is therefore not surprising that it caused frequent complaints from German authorities, and requests for change to a more consolidated police organizational structure. By 1950, the allies relented and permitted the German Laender to begin the process of recentralization toward state-based police systems. The French Zone did not require significant recentralization, but this could not be claimed for the British and American zones. In the British sector, North Rhine-Westfalia moved rapidly, completing state-level consolidation by October 1953. The American areas were the slowest to recentralize, with the newly created state of Baden-Wuerttemberg consolidating all but three major city departments into its state police by 1966. Total recentralization in that state, however, was not completed until the city of Stuttgart's police was consolidated into the state police in 1973.

The Standing Council of Interior Ministers, in its 1972 security plan for all of Germany, called for the elimination of all communal police departments in favor of state-level consolidation. As noted, Baden-Wuerttemberg followed that recommendation the following year. Hessen, which had centralized the police agencies of all cities under 100,000 in population by this time, absorbed the remaining large city departments into the state police system by the beginning of 1974. The state of Bavaria, known for its relatively independent stance in Germany, was the last state to complete the consolidation process, with its largest city police department, that of Munich, joining the state system in 1975. Although the various German state police departments are independent of one another, national cooperation and unity in the provision of police service are so developed that since 1975 all states have agreed to uniform their police in the same way, and to mark their police cars in a like manner. As previously noted, only the state seal on police car doors and the sleeve patches on the uniforms of officers serve to

identify the home state of the police officer. After the German reunification, this state based system was also implemented in the German states (Laender) that formerly made up East Germany.

Since the American decentralized police structure is maligned as being inefficient, particularly with crime rates in the United States higher than in most other countries, does it not follow that it may be useful to reexamine the American system? If a centralized police is more efficient, then the first question to be asked would be how centralized should it be? Currently, the average American is subject to multiple and distinct police jurisdictions: federal agencies, state police organizations, county sheriffs, and local police. In addition, it is not uncommon in the U.S. to have smaller police agencies of limited focus, such as bridge police, housing police, airport police, campus police, transit police, etc. No wonder that cooperation and coordination can be challenging.

At first glance, a single national police would seem to be the most logical system. Possibly, through nationalization, the greatest gain in efficiency and professionalization could be realized, and the citizen would be able to relate to and depend on a single police jurisdiction. All the benefits that consolidation should offer would be maximized. Fortunately for those who fear a powerful centralized police in the United States, a national police structure is an impossibility without a fundamental change in the basic system of government, which is certainly unthinkable for a multitude of reasons. Once significant difference between the U.S. and most other nations is the structure of the entire criminal justice system. While most nations have a centralized police they also have a single criminal code and court system, but because there are fifty different criminal codes and state court systems in America, a single national police structure would be difficult if not impossible to establish without major constitutional changes. The American federal system leaves the power to enforce laws to the states with few exceptions, and therefore if the maximum level of police centralization were to take place, it would most likely be limited to no higher than the state level.

Police consolidation, however, would be difficult to accomplish in the United States at any level. Locally elected officials and police chiefs have substantial interest in retaining control of the police, and they argue that such local control best guards against police abuses. The difficulties experienced by some police agencies in preventing corruption or perceived abuses of police power, however, do not provide unqualified support for the wisdom of local control of police. Could control at the state level offer an acceptable compromise? Since the state is the primary lawmaking and enforcing body, is it not appropriate that it should assume the burden of professionalizing and managing the police? However appropriate state control of law enforcement might seem, that is not how American police forces have developed. Yet, although state control was not the American development model, that did not hinder rapid police development from a numerical standpoint and some examples of police consolidation do exist in the U.S., but the underlying reasons may be more fiscally based than professionalization or effectiveness (Meine, 1990).

Fiscal Imperatives Versus Political Agendas and Public Policy Implications

Despite acknowledging that a number of legitimate concerns about the efficacy of America's extremely localized and decentralized administrative model had yet to be resolved, including those that involved consolidation issues, Meine's (1990) study suggested that the efficiency and effectiveness of police services were not greatly influenced by the level of centralization. Interestingly enough, although that research featured international comparisons, its conclusions were not unlike those proffered by Ostrom, et al. (1973), in their study of metropolitan area police consolidation in Indiana. However, in

light of Nelligan and Bourns' (2011) more recent study of the California experience, most importantly their conclusion that significant advantages may result from the consolidation or contracting of police services, the issue rightfully continues to merit examination and interest.

Furthermore, with the socio-economic times having changed dramatically in the ensuing years and within the contemporary context of strained public resources, and renewed concern about the direction of policing in America, the question of consolidating police services or contracting for them, a topic never far from the surface, has deservedly reemerged as a topic of scholarly interest with significant pragmatic ramifications. Before the recently simmering crisis in policing, the question appeared to be considerably less about the effectiveness of such services, and considerably more about the need for fiscal responsibility. For the purposes of this paper, police consolidation and contracting of police services with outside agencies will be considered as part of the same question, since in either case, such a move results in fewer police organizations through consolidation, elimination of agencies or even the decision not to create such agencies.

Considering the European experience and the contemporary policing climate in the U.S., it is appropriate to revisit the question of police consolidation and contracting for police services by examining a number of such experiences and efforts nationwide. Those efforts include communities which, in response to increasingly difficult economic times, are seeking to control local government expenditures, including the cost of localized police services as they seek to balance 1) the currently unrelenting mandate to control spending with 2) the more traditional, but equally unrelenting political imperative to maintain local control of police services, while still focusing on 3) effective law enforcement.

While the nature of this review and its findings preclude the offering of a definitive solution on how to accomplish the daunting task of merging the two strongly advocated and widely disparate perspectives, it has produced two inescapable conclusions. The first is that attempting such a significant change without generating undue escalation of the already polarizing perspectives would be the scenario most likely to produce a successful outcome, and second, that the genuine need for additional research to identify the factors that have, or perhaps more importantly, have not been successful within the growing number of communities confronting this frequently contentious and high profile public policy challenge of policing and public safety.

The Professionalization Issue and More

Although the issue of fiscal responsibility *vis-à-vis* the efficiency of various options for providing police services are the significant concerns for any government, there are additional and interrelated factors that have proven to be of significance in the nation-wide debate about the role, power and organization of police. Police organizations in many nations have had a history of being used as an oppressive controlling force over the population, and in the United States the issue of aggressive policing and perceived excessive use of force, including deadly force, especially in minority communities, has raised significant social backlash. The situation in the United States has resulted in a renewed loss of trust, especially in minority communities, with the reported side effect of police a reluctance to act and a resultant rise in violent crime by emboldened miscreants.

Clearly, efforts to ensure the most professional police are critical, but questions about the legitimacy of police service qualifying as a profession at all may create barriers to the professionalization effort. One potential at least partial answer may be to re-examine the consolidation of police services, especially since the traditionally decentralized nature of American police services has been an unavoidable and overriding consideration throughout the debate about police effectiveness.

Consolidation and the Profession of Policing

Unfortunately, the thousands of independent police organizations and their supporting civil service systems at the federal, state, and local levels are not particularly conducive to the creation of a generic profession of "police service." More specifically, and of particular relevance to this paper, is the fact that there is no common body of knowledge linking these disparate entities; there is no universally agreed upon comprehensive educational standard required for an entry-level position in law enforcement, and there is also not a universally accepted standard for performance evaluations and criteria for advancement. The absence of such criteria increases the challenges entailed in increasing police professionalism in general and more effective policing in particular. Resolution of these considerable concerns would certainly help those pursuing careers in police services to elevate the standing of their calling and could, perhaps more importantly, provide an additional tool for systematically acquiring the services of the most highly qualified applicants.

Whether classified as a profession or not, the behaviors associated with professionalization are, without question, critical to the building and maintenance of public trust in those who perform the countless duties associated with police services. In addition, the extensive and widely differing views about the goals of the police, e.g., law enforcement vs. public service, produce incredible complexities for police officers, with obligation dissonance being manifested in a number of areas, especially in the aftermath of civil unrest spawned in a number of cities because of perceived inappropriate use of force, including deadly force. The consequence of the contemporary criticism of police actions and calls for prosecuting offending officers is suspected to be related to more hesitant policing in some cities with an associated rise in crime.

The Issue of Decentralization and Local Control

In addition to its contribution to the profession/professionalization debate, the fact is that policing in the United States has always been a community based undertaking and has been a high-profile political issue that has also evolved into a central and predictably contentious consideration when major changes of any kind in police services are under review. The emphasis on the political question is clearly the case with regard to the consolidation issue.

As previously noted, although the United States is not the only developed country with a decentralized police system, it is clearly one of the very few, especially after most European nations, even those that once relied on a localized model, having abandoned that approach in an effort to build a more professional police (Meine, 1990; Bacon, 1982; Harnischmacher & Semerak, 1986). Furthermore, and most recently, it is significant to note that looking at the issue cross-culturally reveals that despite its more centralized approach to policing, the United Kingdom is considering further consolidation and Canada too is engaged in the debate, especially because of financial exigencies (Fantino, 2013).

Little has changed over the years in the local approach to policing, despite criticism by the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice and others, both internal and external to law enforcement, that the community approach limits effectiveness and professionalism and has routinely been alleged to have contributed to police corruption (Mark 1976; Murphy, 1996). More specifically, in its 1967 report, the Commission was understandably concerned about fragmented enforcement efforts since, at the time of that study, over 420,000 police personnel were employed by more than forty thousand separate agencies, often with overlapping jurisdictions, and with limited interagency coordination (President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice, 1967).

Even earlier, the decentralized nature of American policing was posited to be a detractor to police effectiveness when in the 1931 the U.S. National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, commonly called the Wickersham Commission, suggested that the multitude of police forces and their varying standards of organization were described as contributing to ineffectual law enforcement in this country (U.S. National Commission on Law Observance and Enforcement, 1931). While law enforcement has arguably made great strides since then, similar concerns continue to be expressed, and proponents of consolidation continue to argue for the benefits of consolidation based policies (Tulley, 2002).

The reported number of local police agencies in the United States varies significantly depending on the documents consulted, but is reported to be between 12,000 and 18,000. Regardless of the actual number of contemporary local police departments, more than half of which employ fewer than ten officers, the desire for local control has frequently won out over all other issues, arguable even at the expense of efficiency and effectiveness (Reaves, 2010). The fact that policing in the United States has continued to be a local endeavor, has also fueled the continuing debate about the impact of such an approach on quality law enforcement. In addition to the dysfunctional interagency communication and jurisdictional issues that have reportedly interfered with the effectiveness of American law enforcement, the current 49% clearance rate of the eight index crimes in the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, combined with a decline in the clearance rate for the most serious crimes (e.g. Murder\Manslaughter) from 82% in 1971 to the current 63.8% would seem to provide a compelling reason to continue exploring the potential effectiveness advantages of police consolidation while also appropriately addressing the contemporary funding concerns (UCR,1971; 2011).

Although the current number of police departments in the U.S., as reported in the 2011 UCR, is significantly different from the number reported by Reaves (2010), other than being somewhat surprising, it is probably of no consequence since 15,000 is still a significant reduction from the more than forty thousand reported by the 1967 President's Commission. And yet, local policing continues to be a very much decentralized affair in the U.S. Furthermore, this fragmented approach to law enforcement continues to raise questions about the effectiveness of policing in America, a question that has been the subject of much discussion and research.

The Emerging Reality

The debate about local control of the police and the quality of their services is no longer exclusively about effectiveness and efficiency, but now encompasses both socio-economic and, perhaps of even greater consequence, political questions especially with the rising concern about both organized

and "Lone Wolf" terrorism coming to the U.S. Recent events in the U.S. and in Western Europe certainly seem to justify such concerns, but such concerns have not yet succeeded in overcoming resistance to the loss of local political control, which has made it difficult for proponents of police consolidation to make their case successfully. While local politics may well have impaired some of the previous consolidation efforts, and there is no reason to believe that they will not continue to do so, the new reality of the current social, economic and political environment has generated a renewed interest in the question (which, again, has never been far from the surface). Despite the evolving focus, there is precious little progress to report toward solving the consolidation debate, and yet if the proponents are correct, it would be appropriate to ask if consolidation "can be done" given the very diverse local political environments in which the police service operates.

Argument: Yes, it Can Be Done--Consolidations with Varying Degrees of Success

One of the earliest and arguably most successful examples of local communities contracting for their police services to avoid establishing their own police agencies is the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office (LACSO) which currently provides such contracted services to more than 40 local communities, and has been delivering those services since the 1950s (LACSO Webpage, 2013).

Another apparently successful consolidation transpired in Jacksonville, Florida, where the police department and the Sheriff's department were consolidated in 1968. The uniqueness of that consolidation is even in evidence on the streets when an uninformed bystander may be surprised to see an official Jacksonville vehicle displaying a "Sheriff "identification on the side and a "Police" insignia on the back, the result of an obvious compromise in the preservation of both identities, without which the ultimately successful negotiations and subsequent consolidation might well have been more difficult. An in-depth study of that effort identified some significant financial benefits, especially in support services, and that the consolidation reportedly had a positive effect on the delivery of police services while also controlling increases in police staffing when compared to national trends, most especially since personnel costs constitute a major portion of police expenditures in any community (Koepsell, Streeter, & Terpstra, 1973). Similarly, in 1973, police services were consolidated in a major Nevada city when the Clark County Sheriff's Department and the Las Vegas Police were merged into the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department.

An additional consolidation effort in a major metropolitan area is the Miami-Dade consolidation in Florida which initially combined the county police and sheriff resources in 1957 and ended with the change to the current name in 1997. While similar in some respects to the previously cited efforts, it is also unique in that it resulted in the Sheriff in essence becoming an appointed police chief rather than an elected sheriff (Miami-Dade, 2013).

It is important to note, however, that the consolidation debate is not limited to major metropolitan efforts. Similar efforts have been discussed, debated, studied, or completed in numerous locations throughout the United States, including a number of locations, large and small, in New Jersey, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, New York, Louisiana, and California as well as individual cases in a number of other states (Superior Court of California, 2009). Another example of large city consolidation efforts, while initially quite costly, the merger of the Louisville Police Department with the Jefferson County, Kentucky police in 2003, continues to hold significant promise for personnel

reductions and additional efficiencies as well as some potential advances in police effectiveness (Wilson & Grammich, 2012).

The push toward consolidation has also not been confined to local communities, with state agencies such as the New York State Police and the California Highway Patrol absorbing smaller agencies into their uniformed state police, and with Alabama and Maryland policy makers continuing to discuss consolidation of various state law enforcement organizations. Similarly, Florida and Massachusetts have consolidated or are studying the consolidation of state law enforcement agencies (CHP Web page 2013; NY State Police Webpage, 2013; Rawls, 2013; Brown, 2012) with one of the most radical consolidation proposals being contained in a Florida Department of Law Enforcement research paper by Feldman (1993) suggesting that law enforcement efforts in Florida be merged into a single statewide agency, a concept not unlike the German postwar example studied by Meine (1990).

Even the federal government has not been exempt from the consolidation debate since the Government Accountability Office was charged with studying the potential merger of the United States Capitol Police (USCP), the Library of Congress Police (LCP), and the Government Printing Office Police (GPOP), a study which suggested a merger between the USCP and the LCP could be beneficial (GAO, 2002).

Argument: But Should it be Done? A Divisive Failure and a Controversial Success

While a failed attempt at consolidation is inevitably problematic, it is disconcerting that a successful consolidation is no guarantee that the contentious debate over the proposed benefits will subside, as evidenced by the renewed consolidation debate in Compton, California. In 2000 the City of Compton voted to disband its police force in favor of contracting with the Las Angeles County Sheriff's Office in an effort to achieve the promised $7 million in savings for the city per year, and to improve the quality of police services (Scott, 2011). Unfortunately, by 2011, a political struggle had re-emerged with one side seeking to reestablish the police department, and the opposition working to retain the contracting arrangement, in large part because of the claimed $40 million cost to operate its own police versus the $17 million being paid to the Sheriff's Office. Not surprisingly the LACSO is strongly defending their services in an effort to preclude their loss of the contract (Garrison, 2000; Scott, 2011). While much of the debate continues to be focused on funding, the Compton situation also exemplifies the political issue of local community control of police services. The budget savings discussions, *per se* are no different, and, as they have come to be routinely introduced, some of the fiscal arguments against consolidation come from both the political front, and, not surprisingly, from the very police leaders whose departments are being considered for elimination (O'Toole, 2010; Kenyan, 2010).

A scan of the hundreds of online documents dealing with consolidation and contracting, and especially those spanning the latter half of the 20th century, suggests that the predominant focus during that period was on the quality of police services. While the fiscal difficulties facing communities throughout the United States resulted in an escalating focus on potential cost savings to be derived from consolidation or contracting, the renewed concern about public safety and professional policing makes consolidation an obvious discussion imperative. An important consideration in the face of contemporary public safety threats is Nelligan and Bourns (2011) aforementioned and impressively extensive study of contracting among Sheriff's departments in California which found not only cost saving and effectiveness advantages in evidence in the California experience, but even introduced the

compelling observation that consolidation could have the potential to improve homeland security. Despite these supportive conclusions, Nelligan and Bourns (2011) recognized the limitations of their study for generalization beyond their specific, California-based findings.

Unfortunately, whether the primary focus is on effectiveness, public safety, or budgetary issues, the reported results continue to vary, with some arguing that increased effectiveness and cost savings are possible through consolidation and contracting (Finney, 1977; Womack, 2012; Superior Court of California, 2000). Additional insights derived from the literature include the possibility that consolidated police departments may well attract more highly qualified applicants for the police services, and that consolidation may lead to improved community safety, improved homeland security preparations and improved interagency communication (Wilson & Grammich, 2012). As would be expected, such arguments are refuted by others who continue to deny that consolidation produces any verifiable improvement in either cost savings or in the effectiveness of police services (Kenyan, 2010; O'Toole, 2010; Schwester, 2011).

Adding to the confusion of these somewhat perplexing and mixed results, Holzer, et al. (2009) in a review and analysis of consolidation efforts in municipalities in a number of states suggested that significant financial advantages to government service consolidation have often been reported. However, by raising concerns about the limited or unclear reliability of the existing data concerning such consolidation efforts, Holzer (2009) adds yet another troublesome, but unavoidable ingredient to the mix. It is therefore not unreasonable to conclude that the question of data reliability coupled with the influence of local politics, and passionate proponents of police consolidation have contributed to potential distortions in the police consolidation literature on both sides of the debate. Despite the contradictions in the literature, governmental consolidation in general and police consolidation in particular continue to generate significant scholarly interest and significant pragmatic concerns, with both perspectives appearing to be firmly entrenched for the foreseeable future.

Does That Leave Us with Any Conclusions?

The literature clearly suggests that despite political opposition and community issues there are a sufficient number of valid reasons to explore consolidation or contracting for police services, especially since there are several successful examples of such consolidation. Considering the confusing and sometimes less than compelling support for or against arguments suggesting potential advantages, the only real conclusion at this point seems to be that this is an important area, both academically and pragmatically, that has remained unresolved for more than 80 years, but Europe offers some examples worthy of study when looking at the value of police consolidation, especially considering the public safety threats facing many western nations. With the addition of financial exigencies to the perpetual and legitimate concerns for police effectiveness, it would seem that the opportune time has arrived to initiate a concerted research effort designed to provide more definitive findings and, at least some temporary closure on this admittedly complicated, but generic issue in public administration in general and police science in particular.

Nelligan and Bourns (2011) argued that contracting for police services, which should include the police consolidation issue, is clearly deserving not only of increased research designed to produce more definitive findings, but that such research should be aimed at clarifying the local situations and political environments that would constitute the circumstances most likely to benefit from potential increased

effectiveness, if that is indeed possible through consolidation, or to gain resource savings from consolidation or contracting of police services. They conclude that the time may be right to refocus the objectives of police studies to include issues pertaining to police organization and consolidation, a conclusion for which the contents of the present paper provide unqualified support. However, while Nelligan and Bourns (2011) have identified and illuminated an impressive list of variables or concerns that should figure prominently in the future research for which they believe the timing may now be most appropriate, the precise nature of that research has yet to be determined. To that end, the content of this paper supports a call not just for additional research, but for additional research of a specific type, namely, a carefully designed meta-analysis as a means to begin systematically gathering, codifying, and analyzing the data described by Nelligan and Bourns, as well as the additional variables that will undoubtedly emerge in the design phase of the research.

The discussion then turns back to the European example, and what if any lessons could be learned from those experiences, despite the structural and political differences. An important part of and research then should focus on the experiences of European nations which have consolidated police service extensively to seek out lessons learned from the results of such efforts. While European style centralized policing may not be possible or desirable for the United States, the state based approach used by some countries such as Germany, could offer some lessons for U.S. state policy makers. Beyond the uncompromising criteria that all studies relevant to the topic under review be located and included in any credible meta-analysis, a similar mandate requires that the most significant variables 1) not only be identified, but 2) subsequently analyzed in such a way as to generate every possible explanatory advantage. It should be regarded as an imperative that appropriate additional variables be derived via input from both academic and practitioner sources, and that any questionable reliability of existing data (e.g., as pointed out by Holzer, et al. (2009)), be acknowledged and addressed.

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