

FTAA Conference Case Study

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The Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) Conference in Miami, Florida, November 2003

The police departments of the City of Miami and of Miami-Dade County have had their share of experience with civil disturbances over the last 40 years. There were the race riots in 1968 (Liberty City Riot), 1980 (McDuffie Riot), 1982 (Luis Alvarez Riots), and 1989 (Lozano Riots) in the Liberty City and Overtown areas. Then there was the Elian Gonzalez civil disturbance in April 2000.

In each of these incidents, segments of local minority communities (either African-American or Cuban) rioted as the result of some perceived injustice against their ethnic groups. The riots resulted from either police shooting young black men, or from the federal government deporting a young Cuban boy back to his home in Cuba.

One incident of civil unrest – the 1980 “McDuffie Riots” was particularly destructive. Three days of rioting in Liberty City, Overtown, Brownsville, and Coconut Grove, resulted in 18 deaths and over 180 serious injuries. The damage caused by the rioting was estimated at \$100 million and was thought to have caused the permanent loss of over 3,000 jobs in the black communities of Miami. Morale among the rank and file of both major police departments in the County were at an all-time low.

The McDuffie incident is also significant, in that it led to the innovation of the modern Mobile Field Force (MFF) model for police response to civil unrest. The “Miami-Dade” model, as it is commonly referred to, was actually a co-invention by officers from the City of Miami Police Department (MPD) and the Dade County Public Safety Department (now called the Miami-Dade Police Department – MDPD).

In effect, both police departments had sustained considerable injury and damage, both physically and to their reputations as a result of these civil disturbances. Much of the damage resulted from lack of aggressive response from the officers who had been shell-shocked from the community’s reaction to the killing of Arthur McDuffie, and the resulting not-guilty verdict of the involved officers.

Ironically, it was during the difficult times of the post-McDuffie period that many innovations, such as the Mobile Field Force concept were born. It did not take long before the MFF concept was put to a test with the 1982 “Luis Alvarez/Overtown” riots and again in 1989 with the “Lozano” riots. In both cases, the field forces worked marvelously, as both civil disturbances were quickly quelled.

By the time that the Mobile Field Forces were used to quell the Elian Gonzalez disturbances in 2000, the MDP and MDPD had become renowned for their innovative crowd control practices. The subsequent innovation of Special Event Response Teams (SERT) as an intermediary response to peaceful or marginally disobedient crowds further added to the MDPD’s expert standing among national and global police departments.

In 2001, the MDPD hosted a week-long Disorder Management Symposium that was attended by commanders and supervisors from departments throughout the United States, as well as a few from other nations. The MFF concept (and later the SERT model) has been adopted by police departments across the nation as the best way to deal with large and unruly crowds.

The Free Trade Area of the Americas Conference (FTAA)

The FTAA agreement between the United States and the majority of Latin American and Caribbean nations had come about as the result of global economic meetings between the heads of state of those countries during the Summit of the Americas Conference in Miami-Dade in 1984. Like the NAFTA agreement before it, the FTAA has drawn a considerable amount of opposition from the anti-globalization “fair trade” crowd.

The violent protests against global economic structures and free trade agreements first came about in 1999, during the World Trade Organization (WTO) conference in Seattle, Washington. These riots caught the authorities by surprise and signaled a shift in the paradigm of police civil disorder management. After Seattle, there were several other violent protests by an informal anti-globalization alliance of unionists, communists, and anarchists. These included riots in Montreal, Canada; Genoa, Italy; Cancun, Mexico; and Washington D.C. Not only were the WTO conferences being targeted, but other worldwide economic forums such as the G-8 Conference and the World Economic Forum (WEF) were also being singled out by the radical groups.

The secretariat of the FTAA decided to bring the conference to Miami, Florida in November of 2003. High-level delegations from all the participating nations of the Western Hemisphere would be converging in Miami for the one-week conference. Being aware that the conference would attract the same type of violent protestors seen at Seattle, Montreal, Genoa, and Washington D.C., both the MPD and the MDPD commenced preparations for the likelihood of very large crowds and violent protests.

Early, preliminary planning at the MDPD started as soon as the department became aware of the conference. Many of the strategic and tactical concepts that were developed for the FTAA had already been conceptualized by a select number of mid-level managers (lieutenants) who had been aware of the problems in Seattle, Genoa, and Montreal for several years. It had become obvious, that the Mobile Field Force concept that had been born in Miami-Dade would no longer work against this new type of radicalized adversaries. So when the chiefs and directors of the two police departments ordered their planners to get ready for the FTAA conference, the lieutenants who were assigned the task already had a concept in mind.

Simply stated, the new MDPD strategic concept in response to the Anarchist/anti-globalization protestors expected for the FTAA was this:

- Emphasis on the *offensive* rather than reliance on defense alone (i.e., do not be passive)
- Inside and outside deployment (i.e., do not put all your forces behind a fence)
- Emphasis on unit mobility, rather than the static, linear tactics of the past

- Intelligence driven (know your opponent's every move ahead of time)
- Proactive enforcement (i.e., strike early and strike hard – don't wait until things get out of hand)
- Matching up with the adversary: "The right tool for the right job" (There were many different types of protestors, and protest behaviors, therefore different types of units were created to match up against each type)
- Emphasis on strict unit discipline (to prevent being goaded into a disadvantageous skirmish)

Of course, the upper-level management and the politicians didn't know it yet. It would take a considerable amount of convincing by the mid-level lieutenants before the command staff would "buy into" these new concepts.

Meanwhile, at the Miami PD, a similar process was taking place among their mid-level managers. However, there were some significant differences in the way the two major police departments in the area viewed the oncoming event. This became quite obvious to the planners from both agencies when they first met for a cup of coffee at a Denny's Restaurant in Miami Springs (neutral territory). It needs to be understood, that there has been tension between the two departments for many years. Differences in the approaches of the two departments to the Elian Gonzalez disturbances in 2000 were very obvious, with the City of Miami field forces being portrayed on television as an undisciplined force, while the County officers were portrayed as being highly disciplined and well trained. Several incidents seemed to support this public perception.

This perception was also shared among the rank and file of both departments. The County looked at the City officers as being out of control, poorly supervised, and undisciplined. On the other hand, many City officers agreed with this portrayal, but they also disliked the way that the County officers looked down on them. After all, it wasn't their fault that they were poorly organized. It was their command staff that was lacking.

The tension between the departments pervaded all levels, but was at its worst at the mid-level management (majors and captains). Typically, these are the ranks where the most headstrong and ambitious personality types tend to be in a police organization. It's at this rank level that most of the acrimony between the departments would come to bear during the event.

The morning of the first meeting at Denny's revealed some of the early points of contention between the main planners of the two departments. The captain who would be the operational commander of the mobile field forces coordinated by the City generally viewed the tactical situation as being a defensive and static operation that focused on the defense of perimeter fences. By contrast, the captain who would be the overall operational commander of the County task forces (field forces, combined with SERT teams, CUT teams, and bicycle teams) had supported the recommendations of his lieutenants, who favored the mobile and offensive approach.

Another serious point of contention was discussed during the meeting at Denny's. Both sides agreed with the concept of putting teams of undercover officers within the crowds to provide real-time intelligence about the adversaries' movements. However, according to the City captain, the undercover

teams would also act as “snatch teams” which would be responsible for making arrests inside the crowds.

To the County captain and his lieutenants, that seemed to be a risky and foolish tactic. The last thing they wanted to see was a situation where one of their officers would mistake an armed undercover snatch team officer for a bad guy. The chances of a “friendly fire” incident were high in this type of situation, despite the City captain’s assurances that the undercover officers would be wearing a distinct colored cap to identify themselves. It was obvious to the County lieutenants, that this part of the plan was fraught with peril. In the heat of battle, it was too much to ask from a field force officer to make the type of critical decision based solely on their ability to recognize the color of a cap.

Conversely, The County planners wanted to use undercover officers embedded into the crowds, exclusively as observers and reporters of movement. These “field intelligence teams” would be armed, but would not be allowed to engage in any arrests. Use of their weapons would be strictly limited to life-saving situations only. The differences in perspective and strategy between the two departments had become obvious from the very beginning. Unfortunately, this meeting would only be the beginning of the conflict between the two agencies.

Miami PD is Designated as the Lead Agency

Several weeks after the initial meeting at Denny’s, a decision was made at the policy-making (political) level of government that the City of Miami PD would be the lead agency for the event. The decision was made because the majority of the FTAA-related events were located in Downtown Miami, which is mostly City jurisdiction. The jurisdictional map in Downtown Miami; however, is very patchy. The American Airlines Arena, the Port of Miami, the Stephen Clark Government Center, the Dade County Jail, Jackson Memorial Hospital, and Vizcaya (site of one of the main events) were all County jurisdiction. The remainder of the Downtown area is City jurisdiction (although the County shares co-jurisdiction there as well).

The decision to designate the City of Miami PD as the lead agency really rankled the MDPD command staff and mid-level managers in charge of planning. This meant that the City PD would be making the most critical decisions based on a strategic model that the County planners viewed as being significantly flawed. Also, there was a significant size disparity between the two departments. The MDPD had over 3,500 sworn officers in the entire department, of which 1,500 had been specifically assigned to the FTAA mobilization. Meanwhile, the Miami PD only had only 1,500 total sworn personnel in their entire department. The commitment of manpower resources by the County was as much as the total number of sworn personnel in the City. This was another reason that the County staff was not pleased with the decision. It was as if the United States Central Command had subordinated their forces in Afghanistan to the command of the Afghan government. To the County staff, this decision made little sense. Nevertheless, they were committed to making the plan work, whether they agreed with the plan or not.

The Event

By the time that the event week commenced, the incident and operational commanders from both departments hardly spoke with each other. Mid level managers stopped going to each others' meetings and communications between the two agencies had nearly come to a halt. The only people that seemed to be exempt from the petty squabbling were the lower level rank-and-file sergeants and officers, who deal with one another on a daily basis, and cannot afford to have bad relations. After all, their lives depend on them backing up each other on a daily basis.

The City set up their command post and a Joint Operations Command (JOC). The County also set up their own incident command post, as well as a Tactical Operations Command (TOC). In all of these, the respective departments appointed liaison officers to each others' facilities. There was also a common radio link via a command frequency that the commanders of both departments shared. That was the extent of the cooperation and coordination between the two departments throughout the event. Face-to-face meetings between the incident commanders from the City and the County during the week of the event were rare.

As the FTAA event week wore on, the relationship between the commanders of the two departments became increasingly antagonistic. On several occasions, one agency ordered the other agency's helicopter to leave the airspace over the Downtown area. The other agency retaliated by overriding the order through the Miami International Airport control tower.

There was an incident early in the week, where two separate suspicious packages believed to be bombs were discovered within 70 feet of each other near the Government Center. The County Bomb Squad that was already on the scene of both suspicious packages was ordered to stand down and not approach the second package, because it was technically in City jurisdiction. This unfortunate conflict at the command level could have had serious repercussions at the tactical level, if the packages had indeed been bombs. It turned out that the first package was a hoax device set by the protestors, while the second package was a homeless person's belongings. This time, the petty conflict between the commanders of the two agencies did not harm anyone. However, it was evident to all that problems would continue throughout the week.

Thursday was the most eventful day, as over 10,000 protestors crowded the narrow streets of Downtown Miami. Mixed among these 10,000 protestors, were approximately 500 – 600 hardcore Anarchists and "Black Bloc" rabble rousers, armed with slingshots, knives, smoke bombs, bricks, and anything else you can think of.

Troubles began early on Thursday, when a crowd of several hundred violent protestors probed the northern perimeter of the County area of operations. That crowd worked its way toward the Government Center, where they made their best efforts to intimidate and coax the County field forces to retaliate against them. The highly disciplined County officers stood their ground and did not allow themselves to get goaded into a bad response.

About a half hour later, the City field forces were taunted by the same group as it moved eastward toward the Intercontinental Hotel perimeter fence, where most of the delegates were staying. The City

officers were pelted with urine, feces, and paint by the protestors. In turn, the City field forces responded with less-lethal munitions, including Pepperball and (unfortunately for an innocent photographer in the area) with 12 gauge “Super Sock” rounds. Although the Super Sock is considered a less-lethal munition, it does not lend itself for use in large-crowd situations, and should never be aimed toward someone’s head. In the unfortunate case of the innocent photographer, the Super Sock lodged under the skin of the Occipital lobe and he lost one of his eyes as the result of the inappropriate use of a less-lethal munition. The City would settle out of court on the resulting civil case several years later.

Approximately an hour later, the situation became very precarious, as a group of approximately 400 – 500 Black Bloc and Anarchists unleashed their planned main attack. Several hundred violent protestors ran down the narrow streets of Downtown Miami, destroying everything in their path, in a scene reminiscent of Seattle in 1999. It was during this main attack that the County’s *mobile* field forces really showed their mettle.

At the direction of the incident commander, several County field forces chased and dispersed the large groups of Black Bloc protestors westbound as planned. Arrests of several pockets of protestors were made along the way at several intervals. The plan was being executed exactly as the MDPD lieutenants had envisioned several years before. Unfortunately, the City’s decision to deploy most of their field forces inside their “hard” perimeter, significantly limited their ability to move aggressively against the Anarchists and Black Bloc who were running amok in the Downtown streets outside the perimeter fence. The County (and some other agencies’ field forces) took the offensive that ultimately led to the successful conclusion of the incident.

There was another incident on the next (and last) day of the event that involved over 26 arrests at the County Jail. However, this incident, which went off relatively well, only involved the County field forces.

Even after the FTAA was over, the acrimony between the two departments continued. This was evident as the incident commanders from each agency testified at the Civilian Review Panel hearings, and later in civil depositions resulting from numerous law suits. During the testimony, there was some finger pointing between the commanders of the two agencies. However, the majority of the infighting was done privately, and was not readily evident to the public.

Despite all the acrimony, the event turned out fairly well. The strategy and tactics that the County lieutenants had formulated several years earlier, worked exactly as expected. The protestors were used to being treated with “kid gloves” like in Cancun, Genoa, and Montreal. They never expected the field forces in Miami-Dade to be as disciplined, coordinated, and aggressive as they turned out. While Seattle resulted in a paradigm shift for police civil disturbance tactics, the FTAA in Miami was a paradigm shift for the violent anti-globalization protestors. They were caught off guard, and they’ll have to adjust their future tactics accordingly.

References

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