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CIVIL DISTURBANCE - APPLICATION OF FORCE

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4 September 1970

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SUMMARY

A study of civil disturbances between 1966-68 reveals wide differences with respect to the application of force by those in authority. These differences range from the application of no force in the hope that the demonstrators could be reasoned with, to the use of immediate suppressive means. The principle conclusion of this study is that it is the immediate show, not use, of overwhelming force that offers the greatest hope of restoring order in a minimum of time.

CIVIL DISTURBANCE - APPLICATION OF FORCE

In my opinion a riot is like a fire. Every fire starts with one small flame. The fire department has to get in there quickly enough with sufficient power to knock that fire out before it gets out of control...¹

--Jersey City Mayor Thomas J. Whelan

Civil disturbances are not new to the American scene as they date back to the beginning of the history of our nation. Much has been written concerning the causes of civil disturbances; it is generally believed that these causes can be classified as either racial or economic in origin. This paper does not concern itself with why disturbances occur but rather with the actions of officials in the application of force in their quelling.

In preparing this essay, a total of 79 civil disturbances occurring between 1966-68 were studied. This period was selected as it represents the era in which riots rose to a peak of intensity in terms of death, injury and property damage. In 1966 there were 38 disturbances which resulted in 11 deaths, 500 injuries and 10 million dollars in property damage.² This toll rose sharply in 1967 when 128 disturbances were recorded with 117 deaths, 2000 injuries and property damage exceeding 160 million dollars. The year 1968 set new highs in intensity. For the first six months of that year, largely as a result of the death of

¹"How to Stop Riots," US News and World Report, August 14, 1967, p. 41.

²"Riot Outlook for '68," US News and World Report, July 15, 1968, p. 31.

Dr. Martin Luther King, 131 disturbances were recorded with 46 deaths, 3,500 injuries, and 67 million dollars in property damage. 1968 also saw the employment of some 38,000 Federal troops augmenting local and state forces.

Six disturbances were selected for presentation in this study. These disturbances demonstrate the wide range of actions taken by the authorities in applying force and indicate successes as well as failures. Conclusions are reached which will, hopefully, be of value to all concerned in future operations.

CHICAGO - JULY 1966

It was hot in Chicago with the temperature in the 90's and the sun burning down on the roofs of buildings in the Negro slum district of the West Side.³ On Sunday, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke on non-violence to a crowd of 40,000 at a civil rights rally at Soldiers Field.

The act, which triggered the largest civil disturbance since Watts, was a simple, in fact, innocent thing. A group of children on Tuesday evening opened a fire hydrant in an attempt to cool off. A police car with two officers arrived on the scene and tried to turn off the water. The youngsters heckled the police until finally they arrested several persons for interfering. This action resulted in a group of 200 Negroes going on a rock throwing, looting foray

³"West Side Story," Newsweek, July 25, 1966, p. 11.

lasting until midnight at a nearby shopping center. Wednesday, during daylight hours, the area remained relatively calm with some 400 police patrolling the area but as dusk came, crowds again gathered and, as if on signal, pelted the police with rocks and bottles. By nightfall, the riot was in full swing with gun shots being heard and fires blazing in the area. The high rate of incidents continued until early morning when the pace slackened somewhat for the remainder of the day. It was on Thursday evening that the riot peaked. By now, the bricks and bottles had fully given way to bombs and guns.⁴ From an area of a few blocks around the fire hydrant, the disturbance had now flared outward to cover some 12 square miles. Dawn on Friday morning brought a break in the weather with temperatures dropping into the low 70's; however, widespread looting and incidents of violence continued and the Mayor requested that National Guard troops be brought into the area. By late Friday afternoon, some 4,200 Guardsmen arrived on the scene and moved into position on the West Side. At dusk the police, now numbering 1,000 and reinforced by the Guard, dug in for another night of disorder; however, to everyone's relief, the night was quiet. Whatever the reasons, the break in the weather or the presence of the Guard, the riot on the West Side of Chicago was over. The final results of this disturbance showed two Negroes dead, two policemen shot and in critical condition (both recovered), scores of police and civilians injured, more than 300 Negroes arrested and an extensive

⁴Ibid.

loss in property.⁵

It is interesting to note that, as an aftermath to this disturbance, Mayor Daley met with Dr. King on Friday and promised some open fire hydrants with sprinklers attached, a request for Federal funds to build swimming pools on the West Side, and appointment of a citizens committee to assist in easing tensions in the area.⁶

TAMPA, FLORIDA - JUNE 1967

It was a very hot day in Tampa with the temperature over 90 degrees.⁷ Late in the afternoon, a photo store was broken into. Three suspects were given chase by the police. The chase ended in a Negro housing complex where one of the suspects, a 19 year old black youth, was injured under circumstances which made it appear that he had been shot in the back with his hands raised in surrender. A crowd quickly gathered around the youth as he lay on the ground. An ambulance was summoned, but it lost its way and finally a police officer put the boy into the squad car and drove him to the hospital where he died shortly thereafter.

Tampa has a riot control squad. On this day, they had been assigned duties related to keeping order within a crowd watching the boat races in Tampa Bay. At 7:00 p.m. this squad, already tired from their

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 12.

⁷Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, March 1, 1968 (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc. 1968), p. 42.

daylong efforts, returned to the police station where they were told to stand by until a report that a crowd of 500 persons was gathering in the Negro housing area was checked out.⁸ A police car sent into the area could find no crowd, and the hot and tired riot squad was dismissed.

Shortly after the dismissal of the riot squad, the police were informed that, in fact, a crowd had gathered within the housing area. A Negro police officer was sent into the area in an attempt to disperse the crowd.⁹ This attempt failed, stones were thrown, some looting began, and the first fire was set. At the outbreak of hostilities, the police relying on past experience, withdrew from the area hoping this would assist in dispersing the crowd, but this time the maneuver did not work.

One fact now becomes clear and this is that there was a complete lack of intelligence being received by the police on the true nature and extent of the feelings of the people. This is partially attributed to the fact that the riot-trained police were not available. Regardless of the cause, the police were slow in reacting. It was not until 11:00 p.m. that the sheriff's office was requested to send help. At 11:30 p.m., the recall order went out to the personnel on the riot squad. By this time the riot encompassed an area of several square blocks which were lit up by the flames of burning buildings. Gun shots were heard coming from the riot area; police, however, were ordered not to return the fire. It is interesting to

⁸Ibid., p. 43.

⁹Ibid., p. 44.

note that at no time during the riot did the police use firearms. No policeman or civilian was shot during the disturbance. By 1:00 a.m., the police had sealed off the area and firemen were putting out fires with no opposition. It appeared that order had been restored and the riot was over. For the next 12 hours, the situation remained calm; however, the police on duty were by now tired after 24 hours on station. There were no forces in reserve and, as a precaution and to give the men rest, a request was made for National Guard support. The Guard arrived in early evening of the same day and replaced the police on perimeter duty. The situation remained calm for the next 24 hours, at which time it was reported that tensions were rising again. The principal reason given was the presence of the Guard. A suggestion was made to the effect that the Guard should be withdrawn and replaced by patrols of volunteers from within the troubled area. A total of 126 youths, some of whom had participated in the riot, were recruited into what was called the "Youth Patrol."¹⁰ This patrol took to the streets and maintained order after the Guard was removed. With the success of this action the riot in Tampa came to an end.

JERSEY CITY, NEW JERSEY - JULY 1967

Jersey City has as much reason for having a civil disturbance as many other cities of equal size and population. It has problems of slums and race

¹⁰Ibid., p. 46.

tensions; however, even though her next door neighbor, Newark, exploded in violence, Jersey City escaped almost untouched.¹¹ The force applied by local officials took on a form different from that of sending armed personnel into the street. Its application started with a well-developed system of intelligence wherein local authorities were able to identify and locate local militant elements. By keeping the probable ring leaders under surveillance, local authorities were forewarned of rising tensions and possible situations which could have led to a riot. Additionally, public notice was served on the community that a riot would not be tolerated and that if it did break out the authorities were prepared to use all weaponry at their disposal to crush it. Additionally, the public was told that local law enforcement personnel required no special authority to use whatever force was required in the quelling of disturbances. City plans called for reinforcement of local police by several hundred State police upon the request of the Mayor. Additionally, plans were made for the rapid deployment of the National Guard if needed.

All of the above arrangements and policies were made known to the citizens and, evidently, in such a fashion as to be credible because Jersey City did not suffer the same fate as did so many other cities.

MILWAUKEE - JULY 1967

This large midwestern city had poised on the brink

¹¹"How to Stop Riots," p. 40.

of disorder for several years. The 80,000-man black community lived in a run-down portion of the city known as the "Inner Core."¹² Their primary complaint was open housing legislation, and they were led in their protests by a white militant black-power priest.

The local officials, long recognizing the potential for violence that existed in the city, had made elaborate plans for the quelling of disturbances. The Milwaukee Police had probably received more riot training than any other comparable force in the country.¹³ Arrangements were made with State officials for the rapid deployment of selected State National Guardsmen into the city. Additionally, the city devised an emergency plan which was simple in design although rather more complex in execution. Namely, if violence broke out, a round-the-clock curfew would be imposed. The plan was intended to isolate the rioters, minimize the danger to the innocent, and give the police and National Guard room to maneuver.

The riot started on a Sunday night when a group of Negro teenagers left a church dance and began breaking windows. Looting and arson began almost immediately. Police were sent into the area where they were met by sniper fire. Three hours after the looting was reported, the Mayor of Milwaukee declared a state of emergency and asked for the National Guard. The first of 4,100 Guardsmen moved into the State Fair grounds within five hours and, under pressure from the police and Guard and aided by a sudden rainstorm, the violence

¹²"The Cage and the Curfew," Newsweek, August 14, 1967, p. 13.

¹³"City Turned Off," Time, August 11, 1967, p. 9.

subsided; however, not before there were several bloody encounters between the police and the demonstrators.¹⁴ Early Monday morning, the curfew was clamped down and the entire city of 775,000 came to a standstill.¹⁵ Businesses and offices were closed and the streets were deserted except for the police and Guardsmen. Barricades were set up on the city's perimeter and vehicles having no business in the city were turned away. Quiet descended on the Inner Core and on the third day, the curfew was lifted during business hours but put on again during the evening. This procedure was used for the remainder of the week at which time the Guard was removed and the curfew lifted. The final results of the riot showed four people dead (all from gunshot wounds), 101 injured, and 958 arrested (mostly curfew violators).

DETROIT - JULY 1967

It was a hot and muggy Sunday morning in the city. At 3:00 a.m., the Crowd Control Squad of the Detroit Police had been sent home since Sunday morning is usually the least troublesome time for police in Detroit.¹⁶ At this time, the 10th Precinct had 44 officers on duty. At 3:45 a.m., a Vice Squad raided a "blind pig" establishment in the 10th Precinct and arrested 82 patrons.¹⁷ It took some time for the

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵"The Cage and the Curfew," p. 13.

¹⁶Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, p. 84.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 85.

police to move this many people to the police station and, despite the late hour, a crowd of 200 persons gathered around the police and their prisoners. As the last police car was pulling away, a thrown bottle broke the rear window and a riot which would result in 42 deaths, 386 injuries, 5,557 arrests, and property damage in excess of 150 million dollars was underway.¹⁸ By 6:00 a.m., the rioting mob had grown into the thousands and widespread window smashing and looting began. Notwithstanding this fact, the police force in the area of the 10th Precinct had received no augmentation; however, by 10:00 a.m. about 25 percent of the 5,000-man Detroit police force had assembled for duty.¹⁹ Of these, about 500 were in the riot area where an attempt was being made to seal off the area. The police, under a go-soft policy directed by the Mayor, made no attempt to interfere with looters and, in fact, were using no force whatsoever. The evening papers featured photographs of looters leaving stores while the police stood outside with their arms folded.²⁰ Up until now, the attitude of the local authorities had been one of standing by in the hope that the people themselves would bring an end to the riot. At about 2:00 p.m., eight hours after the disturbance began, 300 additional police were called into the area of disorder which had spread by this time to over 100 square blocks. By 4:00 p.m., the situation was

¹⁸"Riot Toll," Time, August 11, 1967, p. 9.

¹⁹Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, p. 86.

²⁰Personal observation of Author as a member of "Task Force Detroit," July, 1967.

completely out of hand. Fires were raging out of control and the riot now threatened to boil over into the other areas of the city. The Mayor now made his first request for outside assistance with a plea to the Governor for National Guard help. Most of the Guard were at summer camp, however, 700 of them were at training sessions in the area and these troops took to the streets about 7:00 p.m. or 14 hours after the start of the riot. The Mayor at this time announced a 9 to 5 curfew would go into effect and it was also at this time that the first shot was fired. That Sunday night the disturbance escalated so that by 2:00 a.m., Monday morning, the entire Detroit Police force had been mobilized along with 800 State Police and 1,200 National Guardsmen. An additional 8,000 Guardsmen were on their way from training camp to the city.²¹

We now enter one of the more controversial portions of the story of Detroit, namely, the actions surrounding the request by local authorities for Federal troops. This study will not dwell on this question except to state that it was obvious that the procedures for requesting Federal assistance were not completely understood by State as well as Federal officials. The initial request for Federal troops was made at 2:00 a.m., Monday. Shortly before noon, the President of the United States authorized the sending of a task force into the Detroit area. These troops were not to be committed but would be kept on

²¹Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, p. 95.

a stand-by basis. The first troops of the task force began arriving at an airbase on the outskirts of Detroit at about 4:00 p.m., Monday. As darkness fell on Monday, the riot, which had somewhat abated, showed signs of again picking up steam with reports of increased numbers of incidents involving firearms with several police and Guard being wounded. The situation had so deteriorated by midnight Monday that the President issued the order which Federalized the State Guard and committed some 4,000 Federal troops to action.²² The city was divided in half, with the Regular troops on the East and the National Guard on the West which contained that part of the city where the riot began. The application of force as demonstrated by the Regular forces differed considerably from that used by the Guard. The Regulars were well-trained and most of them had experience in street fighting gained in the Dominican Republic. They used only small arms and exercised extreme fire discipline. They illuminated their area to the maximum extent possible relying on the element of a show of force. The success of these tactics is illustrated by the fact that the Eastern half of the city showed immediate signs of becoming quiet and by Tuesday evening had calmed down completely.²³ The Western portion of the city was not doing as well, however. Few, if any, of the Guard had any experience or training in riot control. They went into the area with automatic weapons and tanks. At the onset, they showed little

²²Robert Higham, et al., Bayonets in the Street, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1968), p. 189.

²³Author, "Task Force Detroit," July, 1967.

in the way of fire discipline. These factors, coupled with the Guard tactic of shooting out street lights and plunging the area into darkness, exacerbated the already tense situation.²⁴

On Tuesday evening the Task Force Commander issued orders that all weapons would be unloaded and that no shots would be fired unless specifically ordered by an officer. It was Wednesday afternoon before this order reached all the elements of the Guard and, by that same evening, the firing on the East side of the city generally ceased. Coincidental with the cessation of firing, the number of fire bombings and lootings decreased markedly. By Thursday it became apparent that the worst was over and that the riot was running out of steam. Friday was calm and on Saturday the Federal troops were withdrawn from the city with the Guard following suit three days later.

CHICAGO - DEMOCRATIC NATIONAL CONVENTION - AUG. 1968

To anyone interested in the study of application of force in civil disturbances, the actions taken by Chicago officials in preparing for the Democratic National Convention presents a most interesting vehicle.

For months prior to the convention, anti-establishment groups made known their intentions to create disturbances in Chicago with their goals varying from outright disruption of the convention proceedings to a mockery of the electoral system.²⁵ For many obvious

²⁴Higham, p. 194.

²⁵"Stalag '68," Time, August 23, 1968, p. 10.

reasons, not the least of which being civic pride, the local authorities, headed by Mayor Daley, took perhaps the most elaborate precautions in history to insure that the goals of the dissidents were not achieved.

It was predicted that 100,000 protestors would be in the city.²⁶ On the side of law and order was a police force of nearly 12,000 men; 5,500 National Guardsmen were called to state duty with 5,000 more being put on alert; the Federal authorities were requested to provide 7,000 Army troops as reinforcements.²⁷ The police force was placed on 12-hour shifts; the Guardsmen were bivouacked in parks near the convention hall and the Federal troops were located in military bases outside the city.

During the five days of the convention, there were constant confrontations between the protestors and the local authorities, but in only two instances did these confrontations escalate to the point of extreme violence. In the first instance, the demonstrators attempted a march on the amphitheater where the convention was being held. It took a maximum police effort, supported by two battalions of the Guard, to restore order. In the second incident, the protestors attempted to storm the Hilton Hotel where many of the convention delegates were quartered. In this case, the local police, without reinforcement, but after a bloody engagement, routed the dissidents.

²⁶"Chicago--An Armed Camp for Democratic Convention," US News and World Report, August 26, 1968, p. 24.

²⁷"Daley City Under Siege," Time, August 30, 1968, p. 14.

At the end of the convention, a canvass of hospitals revealed that 152 policemen had been injured along with over 300 demonstrators.²⁸ Police blotters showed that 583 persons were arrested. More than 60 per cent of them came from outside Chicago. While the demonstrators used a variety of weapons, no firearms were reported found. Most injuries to the demonstrators were reported to be from blows by police clubs. The only discharge of firearms was by the police when throwing gas grenades.

Only two battalions of National Guardsmen were used and their primary role was to give relief to tired policemen. At no time did the situation deteriorate to the point where the use of Federal troops was considered.

Much criticism was levied against local authorities concerning their use of excessive application of force in the maintenance of order. There were outpourings of "police brutality," "armed camp," "Police State" and "STALAG '68." The fact still remains, however, that the announced intentions of the protestors were not achieved. The convention accomplished its goals and a national institution was preserved. The police, despite provocation, utilized only that force necessary. No one was shot and, lastly, and perhaps more importantly, no one was killed.

²⁸"Bites, Battles, Spiders, Nails--," US News and World Report, September 16, 1968, p. 65.

CONCLUSIONS

1. A no nonsense position toward demonstrators must be established and made known to all concerned prior to the outbreak of violence.

RATIONALE: It is quite apparent that the citizens of Jersey City well understood and believed the Mayor of their city when he indicated that any attempt to riot would be met with overwhelming force from the onset. It is not by accident that racist militants residing in Chicago did not take advantage of the convention demonstrations. Interviews with these individuals indicated that they knew what the response of the police was going to be and they wanted no part in the disturbance. In contrast, we see in Detroit what happens when there is a lack of a strong response. Here the local authorities, at least initially, tied the hands of the police in the hopes that the people would reason among themselves and thus reduce the violence. Unfortunately, a riot is a time for emotions; objective reasoning stands very little chance for success. The time for understanding and reasoning is before the violence breaks out, not after.

2. The most critical time in the controlling of a disturbance is the first hour after violence erupts.

RATIONALE: It is most important that the local authorities have a good system of intelligence leading into those areas of potential violence. Upon indications of rising tensions, sufficient forces must be massed for immediate injection into the troubled area. An overwhelming display of force at the very onset of trouble stands a good chance of success. This lack of

intelligence and the dissipation of trained forces permitted the Tampa disturbance to escalate to the point where outside help was required. Again, in Detroit, where no show of force was made initially, the violence quickly spread far beyond its point of origin.

3. The area of disturbance must be quickly sealed off with ingress and egress tightly controlled.

RATIONALE: The initial result of this application of force is to restrict the area of disturbance to the minimum, permitting more effective use of resources available to the local authorities. We note in Chicago, 1966, that the failure to execute this course of action quickly resulted in the area of disturbance being expanded from a few blocks to several square miles. Additionally, this sealing off will protect the innocent by keeping them out of the area. Many injuries, and some deaths, were the result of outsiders either deliberately or accidentally wandering into the riot zone. In Detroit, on the fourth day of the disturbance, the local officials lifted the restriction on travel in the riot area. Within minutes, 12th Street was so congested with sightseers that law enforcement officials lost control of the situation.


4. One of the most effective methods of controlling the situation is to immediately impose, and enforce, an around-the-clock curfew on the city.

RATIONALE: This course of action is not completely popular with local businessmen, as it results in the loss of large sums of money. However, as seen in Milwaukee, it assists in the almost immediate reduction of violence. It is important that the curfew is

rigidly enforced and that violators are arrested and rapidly brought to trial in order that the credibility of the authorities' actions is quickly established.

5. Detailed, but simplified, procedures must be developed wherein authorities are assured of outside assistance in the event local resources cannot control the situation.

RATIONALE: Lack of previously developed procedures for outside assistance permitted the riots in Detroit and Tampa to get completely out of hand before help in the form of the National Guard and Federal troops was received. On the other hand, assistance to Milwaukee officials was asked for and received in a very short time. Any city, possessing the potential for civil disturbance, must complete detailed plans for the swift response to requests for assistance ranging from county and neighboring city support to the provision of Federal aid.


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