

Interview

Lessons in Security from the NYPD

An Interview with Raymond W. Kelly,
Commissioner, New York Police Department



Raymond W. Kelly

EDITORS' NOTE Reflecting upon what makes his current term as New York City police commissioner different from his last, Raymond Kelly cites "the issue of terrorism" as a defining factor. In fact, "it impacts virtually every decision I make," he admits, and it has shaped not only the policies of the NYPD, but also the daily activities of its 52,000 employees. Specifically, the force now has more "plainclothes officers working in areas we are concerned about, particularly on the transit system," Kelly reports, "and there are now heavily armed officers on the street, who represent a new presence in New York City." And, thanks to an internal mobilization of officers with language skills and community connections, "we now have a much deeper knowledge of who lives in the city, what groups are in the city, and what activities happen in the city."

However, despite his emphasis on measures that "help protect the city from terrorist attacks," Kelly has not neglected other areas of public security. Indeed, "through a program called Operation Impact," the force has dramatically reduced serious crime in the city, he points out, while Operation Clean Sweep has maintained a high quality of life for residents. Thus, from an objective perspective, few people would argue with the commissioner's modest claim, "I think I

have made a difference in protecting this city at a difficult time."

A 31-year veteran of the New York Police Department, Kelly served as commissioner from 1992 to 1994 and was appointed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg to serve a second term in January 2002. Prior to that appointment, he served as senior managing director of global corporate security at Bear, Stearns & Co. Inc. From 1994 to 1995, Kelly was director of the International Police Monitors in the Republic of Haiti, and from 1995 to 1996, he was president of Investigative Group International. Kelly served as undersecretary for enforcement in the U.S. Treasury Department from 1996 to 1998, and for the next three years he was commissioner of the U.S. Customs Service, concurrently serving as Interpol's vice president for the Americas from 1996 to 2000. Also a Vietnam veteran and retired colonel from the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves after 30 years of service, Kelly holds a B.B.A. from Manhattan College, a J.D. from the St. John's University School of Law, an L.L.M. from the New York University Graduate School of Law, and an M.P.A. from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

ORGANIZATION BRIEF From its colonial beginnings to its official establishment in 1845 to the present day, the New York Police Department has played an important role in securing public peace, protecting life and property, and ensuring all the rights and privileges guaranteed by the constitution of the United States of America. To help complete its mission of enhancing the quality of life in the city, the NYPD employs 37,000 uniformed officers and 15,000 civilian members in 76 precincts. The department's present-day annual budget is \$3.3 billion.

You have had tremendous success in your current role. The New York City crime rate is at a 40-year low, even though you have 4,000 fewer police officers than in recent years. How did you do that?

Magic. Actually, it was great work on the part of the cops. Simply put, we focused our resources. Of our active force, about 1,000 officers are assigned to counterterrorism duties. With regard to other areas of crime, through a program called Operation Impact, we focused on the areas where we felt we could make the most impact by infusing police officers in a somewhat concentrated form. We had 2,100 recruits in our last Police Academy graduating class. We put about two-thirds of them on the street in 21 different areas where we had identified certain problems. So we established a uniformed presence in those places, and plainclothes officers, the warrant squad, and the narcotics division were also involved. In those 21 areas, crime fell by nearly 40 percent in 2003. Citywide, we saw a 5 percent reduction in crime in 2002, and in 2003, we saw a 6 percent reduction. So Operation Impact has had a major effect, and it's been particularly effective in New York's housing projects, where almost 600,000 of the city's residents live. We've made significant progress with initiatives focusing on narcotics and firearms in those areas.

In our transit system, we have focused more heavily on counterterrorism, stationing officers in stations and on trains and buses. As a result, transit crime is as low as it has been in anybody's memory.

The NYPD also takes quality-of-life issues seriously, as evidenced by the successful Operation Clean Sweep. Our theory is that if you take care of the little things, they can't fester into bigger problems. At the beginning of the Bloomberg administration, people were concerned about the quality of life in the city. However, it hasn't reverted to the levels we saw before the Giuliani administration, partly because of Operation Clean Sweep. We have identified 200 locations in the city that are in violation of the city's overall quality of life, and we monitor them regularly. Being homeless isn't a crime, but aggressive panhandling is a quality-of-life violation. So we offer the homeless transportation and shelter, in an effort to

improve the quality of life on the city's streets and in the city's transit system. We have officers who patrol targeted locations and take pictures of the violations they see. I then send those pictures with a message to the commanders of the precincts where the violations occur. They don't like to get those messages from the police commissioner. So we're well on top of that issue.

Additionally, our homicide rate in 2002 was as low as it has been since Robert F. Wagner was mayor [1954-1965]. In 2003, there were fewer than 600 homicides, a vast change from the 2,262 that took place in 1990. So whether we're taking care of serious crime or quality-of-life violations, we're on top of it.

What can leading executives do to ensure the safety and security of their employees and their enterprises?

First, they should look at their companies from the vantage point of the regular employee. Obviously, there has been a lot of uncertainty since 9/11, and people need to be aware that their employers are concerned about their security. At Bear Stearns, and at the NYPD as well, we focused on educating people about what to do in crisis situations. At Bear Stearns we gave people individual schematics specific to their desks – the locations of the closest exits and procedures for exiting the building. We gave them each a pouch containing a protective mask, flashlight, and whistle, which also had room for other personal items. We did that at the NYPD as well. In addition, we have performed a lot of drills, which I participate in myself. A CEO sends a powerful message when he participates in such exercises. Personally, I received very positive feedback after doing that.

Leaders tend to look at things from a global perspective, but I think we should take a more bottom-up view. You have to protect your information and be able to function normally almost immediately after something happens, so some redundancy in the system is necessary. Those ideas are certainly discussed in the corporate world and the public sector, but the actual mechanics aren't always thought through. In addition, you need security professionals monitoring who comes into your building, and, depending on the nature of your business, you probably need a thorough analysis of your mail systems and other basic business functions.

A final point to make is that security is not a moneymaker for companies, so they tend to marginalize it and go for the cheapest possible options. Many security firms perform contract work for companies, and those companies often change security providers because they are looking to reduce costs. Those frequent changes inevitably impact the quality of the service provided.

So companies aren't allowing enough room in their budgets for security.

No question about it. The events of 9/11 cost New York City somewhere between \$80 billion and \$120 billion, and that's a wild amount of money. So, of course, people are looking to cut their expenses – that's understandable. However, the decision to cut back on security should be closely examined, because threats may be posed by a number of groups, not just terrorists. For example, the security of your company may be threatened by disgruntled employees who have been terminated, or even by a company that shares real estate with yours. So upper management needs to pay closer attention to security in general.

Will such threats be a long-term concern for New Yorkers and the rest of the world?

As far as terrorism is concerned, we're certainly in this for the long haul. You might say that al-Qaeda is something more than an organization; it's a movement. Now other groups are bent on taking down our civilization and our society as we know it. So we'll be dealing with the threat of terrorism certainly through my lifetime and perhaps beyond it.

When the NYPD was faced with falling numbers of recruits, some people suggested the force lower its recruitment standards. Instead you raised the standards, demanding that recruits possess 60 college credits or military experience. Why did you do that?

In this business, you never sacrifice quality for quantity. I wouldn't be willing to lower our standards to meet number requirements because this work is becoming more complex and more demanding and we need qualified individuals to do it.

Is it difficult to recruit qualified candidates, particularly at the executive level, when police jobs are often low paying and relatively thankless?

I think people feel they're on a mission when they join the force. Certainly, 9/11 had something to do with why some of our top people chose to come on board. They didn't want to sit on the sidelines. They wanted to be players in the new world that we have found ourselves in.

This job must carry with it a lot of pressure. Are you able to relax at all?

I don't feel that much pressure, quite frankly. I feel comfortable in this job and I've been here before. As far as relaxing is concerned, I work out and I try to read a lot, but this job takes up a lot of time.

Do you work too hard?

No, I don't. Do I enjoy this job? Absolutely. Do I want to do anything else? No, I'm very happy. I think I have made a difference in protecting this city at a difficult

time. We put in place a lot of procedures and practices – things that will never be fully public – that help protect the city from terrorist attacks. While I have served as commissioner before, the issue of terrorism makes this term different from my last. It impacts virtually every decision I make.

What are some of those hidden protective measures you have put into place?

I can't disclose those details, but we do have a significant number of plainclothes officers working in areas we are concerned about, particularly on the transit system. And there are now heavily armed officers on the street, who represent a new presence in New York City. Initially, people found their presence disconcerting, but now they like to see these officers.

Furthermore, we now have a much deeper knowledge of who lives in the city, what groups are in the city, and what activities happen in the city. In terms of diversity, New York is like no other city in the world. We have about 140 identifiable ethnic groups in the city. We weren't really aware of, or sensitive to, the entities comprising the city before 9/11. Those events made us reexamine the city and our department. For instance, we've identified all of our critical language speakers in the department. We have 45 certified Arabic speakers just in our uniformed ranks, more than any federal agency I'm aware of. We also have certified Farsi, Urdu, and Hindi speakers, among other languages. These officers help us gather information about the city and the rest of the world so that we can be more aware of what's going on. We have a counterterrorism center where we analyze information, and we work closely with the CIA and the FBI. Consequently, we now have more information about what's happening in the city than we have ever had before.

What advice would you offer young people who want to get ahead in life?

You need to have a certain amount of discipline and knowledge about your job. I also think it's necessary to have integrity and enthusiasm. If you don't like what you're doing, you might never succeed and you're certainly not going to be happy. If you find something you like doing, you'll do it well.

I always say that money is overrated. I've never made a decision based on money, and I've never regretted it. America has enough moneymakers. We need visionaries and people with principles. It's nice to have money, but if it's your sole motivation, you're missing something.

So my advice to young people is this: Feel your way around, find something you really like doing, and devote yourself to it totally. That course of action will lead to success. ●