

Science, Technology and the Criminal Justice System

Task Force Report: Science and Technology. Report to the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. Prepared by The Institute of Defense Analyses. U. S. Government Printing Office, 1967. Price \$1.25. xiv + 228 pp.

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What can one say about a report that contains nothing but sure-fire words in its title? *Science; Technology; Task Force Report*. In other times and other places the equivalents of these words might have been: *God; Country; Motherhood; Sin; Decalogue*. When, in addition, you are confronted with a Foreword written by the Attorney General of the United States; three pages of Preface containing *Names*; two additional pages containing more *Names*—what is the lone reviewer to do? Especially when he recognizes many of the names as belonging to highly competent well-meaning friends and former colleagues? And when he understands so well the basic frame of reference which can lead to a document such as this?

One tries faithfully to reproduce the frame of reference; summarize the findings; acknowledge the technical skill with which the effort has been executed—and one deplores the entire enterprise.

The frame of reference is, or by now should have become, a familiar one to everyone. It has been applied to a thousand areas of interest ranging from air defense to poverty. We are told that although the natural sciences and technology have long helped the police to solve specific crimes, scientists and engineers have had very little impact on the overall operations of the criminal justice system and its principal components: police, courts, and corrections.

More than 200,000 scientists have applied themselves to solving military problems and hundreds of thousands more to innovating in other areas

of modern life, but only a handful are working to control the crimes that injure or frighten millions of Americans each year. Yet the two communities have much to offer each other: science and technology is a valuable source of knowledge and techniques for combating crime; the criminal justice system represents a vast area of challenging problems.

One sets up a Science and Technology Task Force within the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. One gives the responsibility for organizing this Task Force to the Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA) with funding from the Office of Law Enforcement Assistance of the Department of Justice. The social and behavioral sciences are

deemphasized, largely because these were subjects already receiving treatment elsewhere in the Commission's work. The system sciences—information systems and computer applications, communications systems and systems analysis—were given primary emphasis. In examining the applicability of technology, the emphasis was placed on identifying requirements rather than on detailed design or selection among equipment alternatives. . . . Among crimes, the primary focus was on the "Index" crimes—willful homicide, forcible rape, aggravated assault, robbery, burglary, larceny of \$50 and over, and auto theft—the predatory crimes which are a principal source of public concern today. Only limited attention was paid to public disorder and vice crimes, and to "white collar crimes" such as illegal price fixing, tax evasion and antitrust violations.

The preliminary results and recommendations of the Task Force include:

A compilation of field data examining certain relationships between police field operations and the apprehension of criminals.

Procedures for improving police responsiveness to call at minimum cost.

An approach which could significantly reduce police radio frequency congestion.

An outline of a research and development program for the development of a semiautomatic fingerprint recognition system to replace the present manual system under which a criminal cannot ordinarily be traced unless a full set of ten prints is available.

Studies examining possible technological innovations for police operations in such areas as alarm systems and nonlethal weapons.

Statistical approaches concerned with the improvement of allocation of police officers in the field.

A procedure for testing means of reducing unnecessary delays in moving cases through the courts.

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An examination of programmed learning techniques as one means of contributing to the rehabilitation of young offenders.

Making auto thefts more difficult.

An exploratory attempt to apply system analysis to the overall justice system.

An outline, but not a detailed design, of a national information system for criminal justice agencies.

A proposal for a national research and development program.

The main body of the report (82 pages) is written lucidly and should be completely comprehensible to any "well-informed layman." Ten appendices contain more detailed treatment but even these should be comprehensible to most readers willing to expend some effort.

What's wrong?

The difficulty probably begins with the decision to establish a free-floating, somewhat disembodied task force to concern itself with "Science and Technology." The charter is so enormous in scope as to be virtually meaningless as a guide for a significant intellectual effort—however enchanting its public relations appeal. And, perhaps inevitably, the task force did not address itself to the problem of throwing new light on our outmoded methods for maintaining public order. It chose, instead, to engage primarily in some virtuoso performances on the application of operations research techniques, program budgeting, computer technology, and cost-benefit analysis to an anachronistic system of police operations and the administration of "criminal justice." Despite many bows in the direction of "system analysis," no conceptually rigorous effort was made to analyze the social requirements for these systems and the full scope of operations in which they are currently engaged. As a result of this performance, the matter of selling new computers, and a variety of other bits of equipment to police forces throughout the country will be facilitated. One could have hoped for much more.

What indeed is the system to which all this "science and technology" is to be applied? At the very least the system must include not only the cops and robbers but the larger populations from which these elements have been isolated. One could generate another report addressed to the problem of maintaining surveillance and control of police activities to insure that infringement of civil liberties does not occur. What automatic alarm systems could be devised for individual citizens to protect them against unfair treatment by policemen? How about an information proc-

essing center and control system to reduce time delays in giving aid under these circumstances? Can one really deal with problems of the Index crimes in isolation from problems of public disorder and "white collar" crimes? Can one seriously consider proposals for new surveillance equipment, alarm equipment, and control procedures apart from considerations of the social milieu in which they are to be employed?

Inevitably, invidious comparisons come to mind. The basic orientation within which the efforts of the Task Force proceeded might be described as "control maximization." In this sense it is very much like the frame of reference of those military experts who have always viewed problems like "counterinsurgency" from a similar perspective. Substitute the word "communist" for the word "robber" and away we go. "Science and Technology" can provide better detection devices, better destruction devices, better casualty counts, infiltration estimates—you name it.

Science and Technology has demonstrated something less than spectacular success in Viet Nam. One welcomes the effort to find new outlets for all the talent now working on military systems. The Viet Nam war will end one day. It would be tragic to discover that our scientists have succeeded only in internalizing "limited conflict" and adapting it to our domestic scene.