

Armed policing is the current balance of armed to unarmed officers at the correct level. Do we need a blended model of unarmed/armed policing?

The traditional social “contract” in the UK mainland between the public and the police involves the ideal of an unarmed police service. In recent years while the public have accepted the more visible role of specialist armed officers on security duties in airports and strategic positions, the majority of officers remain unarmed. Following 7/7 in London and the Derrick Bird case in Cumbria there have been media calls for more police officers to be armed on a routine basis. This would fundamentally change the social contract and the relationship with the British public. The principle of policing by consent and the idea of the citizen in uniform are the fundamental tenets of British policing. Historically the only forces in the UK which are routinely armed are the Police Service of Northern Ireland in Northern Ireland, the Ministry of Defence Police and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary. In contrast all major police forces in Europe, as well as the US, Canada and Australia routinely carry firearms, the exceptions apart from Britain, are the Irish Republic, and New Zealand. In Norway officers carry arms in their cars but not on their person.

Every time unarmed police officers are killed, as with the tragic case of Nicola Hughes and Fiona Bone killed in the line of duty in Manchester in 2013, the question of arming the British Police is raised. So does the current balance protect the public and safeguard officers or does it fail to satisfy either. Is the current balance between unarmed and armed police in the UK suitable for the 21st Century? There appears to be competing agendas for the Police to contend with. These have been illustrated by recent controversy in Scotland about a standing authority which allowed a small number of officers to carry guns while on routine patrol. Politicians and community leaders attacked the nationwide roll-out of officers with a standing authority to carry guns on routine patrols since the formation of Scotland’s single police force. The Forces armed police monitoring group recommended keeping the standing authority in place after it was given intelligence on serious organised crime groups in 2014. The Inspectorate of Constabulary in Scotland (HMICS) in its review of the authority (2014) said the operational need for the authority is justified by national intelligence and threat levels.

However, as well as not considering the impact on public perception, HMICS said a full and informed debate around the deployment of firearms officers to incidents and duties that do not require a firearms response was not conducted. Responding to those who have asked why armed officers are required in quiet country areas such as the Highlands, Chief Constable House cited the gun massacre at Dunblane, Hungerford and also the shootings by Derrick Bird in Cumbria, saying that they had taken place in areas where violent crime was uncommon. This report shows that the police felt they have sound operational reasons to routinely deploy armed officers but they “crossed the line” in what was publicly acceptable.

Would routine arming fundamentally change UK Policing and would ,for instance , the 2011 riots have been policed in a different manner if the police had been routinely armed ?

What is the current balance of armed to unarmed Police officers in the UK?

The numbers of firearms officers in the UK are low and all are specially trained and selected for their role. Of the 32,500 officers in London's Metropolitan Police Service, just 2,740 were "authorized firearms officers" (MPS 2013). There was a total of 4,432 deployments by armed officers in 2011, in London, compared to 4,656 the previous year. The number of times armed officers responded to emergency calls has also fallen in recent years, partly as a result of fewer people reporting the use of guns on the streets, see Figure 2 below .(Evening Standard 31/5/13) .ARVs are called to around 3,000 incidents a year in London and 13,346 in the rest of the UK. Outside the capital, the entire territory of England and Wales is policed with the help of just 4,128 armed officers. There are 431 authorised firearms officers in Scotland of which 275 are performing dedicated Armed Response Vehicle duties. Presently only a small proportion of officers are authorised to use firearms, about 5% of the total number in the UK .The Home office state that in 2010-11 Firearms officers were involved in 17,209 operations ,a decrease of 1,347(7%) on the previous year.

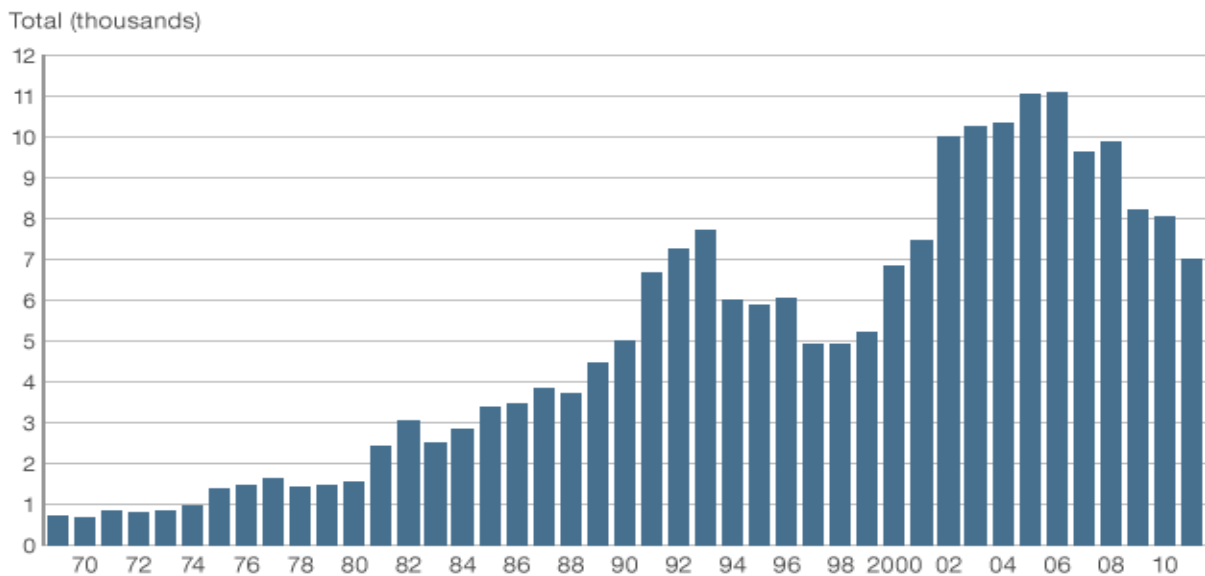
International comparisons

American commentators were surprised by the ease with which British police officers were forced back by rioters in the Summer Riots of 2011 (NY Times 9/8/11) . In 2012, according to data compiled by the FBI, 405 Americans were "justifiably" killed by police (see Figure 1 Economist 15/8/14)



Last year ,2013, in total, British police officers actually fired their weapons three times. The number of people fatally shot was zero. In 2012 the figure was just one. Even after adjusting for the smaller size of Britain’s population, British citizens are around 100 times less likely to be shot by a police officer than Americans. Between 2010 and 2014 the police force of one small American city, Albuquerque in New Mexico, shot and killed 23 civilians; seven times more than the number of Brits killed by all of England and Wales’s 43 forces during the same period.(The Economist 15/8/14).The explanation for this gap is simple. In Britain, guns are rare. (See Home office Figure 2 below)

Firearms offences in England and Wales 1969-2011



Source: Home Office

Figure 2 Firearms Offences in England and Wales 1969 to 2011

History

To understand the present arrangements for armed policing in the UK it is important to look at the history of armed policing in the UK .The creation of specialist units is a recent phenomena .In September 1883 an official questionnaire was sent to sergeants and constables on the outer divisions of London, the results showed that 4,430 out of 6,325 were keen to carry guns. In response the Commissioner and the Home Office allowed revolvers to be carried in outer divisions, pressure was put on officers not to carry the firearms. Two officers were killed from 1878 to 1886 and 13 wounded by firearms in the same period. From then on, all officers who felt the need to be armed could be so. The practice lasted until 1936, although the vast majority of the system was phased out by the end of the 19th century. This shows that the debate on arming the UK Police is far from a recent phenomenon.

The present firearms arrangements for Police in the UK followed highly controversial shooting incidents such as the shooting of Stephen Waldorf in 1983 and the Cherry

Groce in 1985. After the formation of firearms units, all trained officers in each force were brought together under one unit, with a structured training programme headed by senior officers. The concept of Armed Response Vehicles were not introduced until 1991, being first transitioned in London. For decades there have been incidents that have led to calls for issuing all officers with firearms.

What do Police officers feel?

When asked, police officers say overwhelmingly that they wish to remain unarmed. A 2006 survey of 47,328 Police Federation members found 82% did not want officers to be routinely armed on duty. It is a position shared by the Police Superintendents' Association and the Association of Chief Police Officers. An ICM poll in April 2004 found 47% supported arming all police, compared with 48% against. Sir Hugh Orde stated "It is strikingly obvious that bringing firearms into the policing equation does not solve the problem of violent crime, or protect officers from being injured or killed" (The Guardian 20/9/12). He further states "The police service collectively does not want to routinely carry guns – we agree our relationship with the public we serve is too precious to jeopardise". Firearms potentially place a distance between the public and the police and could have a negative impact on community relations. Routine police activity would be seen as law enforcement rather than keeping the peace. Carbine et al (2014) state that in modern times "The police rely upon consensus legitimacy and legal authority... yet they are also empowered and licensed by the state to use force upon their publics". New Zealand has adopted an armed response model similar to Britain, says the International Law Enforcement Forum (2014). There was considerable debate in New Zealand in 2010 when two officers were shot, and Commissioner Peter Marshall wrote: "International experience shows that making firearms more accessible raises certain risks that are very difficult to control." He stated that these considerations included:

- The risk of police having weapons taken from them
- The risk of greater use of weapons against the public and/or offenders
- The ambush can never be controlled, whether or not officers are armed

Arguments for and against arming the Police

Arming officers would make them less approachable to the public, thereby severing important contact with the community. The presence of the British army and armed police in Northern Ireland has created longstanding issues of trust and this is an experience that many leading police officers are unwilling to repeat elsewhere. The perceived advantages and disadvantages for routinely arming the police are shown in Figure 3 below. The recent debate in Scotland was partly driven by the large

Geographic areas in Scotland and the longer response time by ARVs .There is an eternal conundrum about balancing the security of officers and the public against the risk presented by organised crime ,terrorists and lone wolves such as Brevik in Norway. There is an argument that routine arming of Police Officers would act as a deterrent to stop armed criminality ,yet we have seen that this does not stop atrocities such as the shootings of 2 officers in Manchester or Dunblane or Hungerford . There is a counter argument that routine arming would lead to a “ratchet effect” and criminals would carry more weapons to “outgun “ the Police.

One of the greatest safety factors for officers are the heavy sentences given by courts to those that do open fire on unarmed officers .The policing of vulnerable sites in the UK is dealt with by highly trained officers who are trained and selected to deal with potential incidents with restraint and if necessary the ultimate use of lethal force. While acknowledging mistakes by the British Police ,the shooting of those who killed Lee Rigby in 2012 showed that officers arrived quickly ,shot the suspects and then rendered first aid . The two suspects were arrested and stood trial. Would the routine arming of officers deter or stop those suicide terrorist bombers, evidence from Sri Lanka and Israel shows otherwise. The issue of problems in recruiting adequate police numbers following recruitment is not borne out by the experience of recruits to the RUC during the Troubles .Many critics state that the routine arming of the Police would lead to further tragic mistakes such as the shooting of Jean de Menzes following 7/7. However tragic the circumstances of incidents such as Waldorf and de Menzes they are rare and investigated fully by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). Thus gun availability effectively reduces the options currently available to police along the ‘continuum of force’. Would routine arming lead to less use of less harmful alternatives such as tasers, “stun guns”, CS spray, and negotiation. The supposed deterrent effect of arming the Police may deter some criminal behaviour but it may also lead to an escalation in criminal violence. Neither would it stop or deter suicide bombers . Figure 2 above showed that the UK experiences a low firearm crime rate and that crime rate is falling. Arming the Police will not solve serious gun related crime but the Police require sufficient resources to deal with organised crime. The issue of gun related crime lies within the communities afflicted by this issue.

Figure 3 The advantages /disadvantages of routinely arming the Police.

For	Against
Deterrent effect ? An armed police force will deter criminal behaviour	Arming the police will cause an escalation in criminal violence ie the ratchet effect Would it stop or deter suicide bombers/shooters?
Ensures greater safety for officers and the public ,better Protection of officers and the public	Would lead to a “ratchet “effect with criminals Changes the contract with the public Will it lead to a reduction in the continuum of force i.e. would it mean less use of less harmful alternatives such as tasers, “stun guns”, CS spray, and negotiation The risk of police having weapons taken from them,12 Police officers a year are killed in this way in The USA (D Telegraph 19/9/2012) The “ambush” by armed criminal on police or public can never be controlled whether or not officers are armed
The routine arming of officers will lead to better protection	The risk of greater use of weapons against the public and/or offenders When the police are armed, mistakes will lead to innocent people getting shot ie De Menezes
The police should be equipped to react to contemporary problems such as terrorism and organised crime	Will it lead to a reduction in the continuum of force i.e. would it mean less use of of less harmful alternatives such as tasers, “stun guns”, CS spray, and negotiation.
Routine arming did not affect recruitment to the RUC during the troubles	Recruitment will be adversely affected if the police are armed ?
It would deter firearm offences.	Gun control following Dunblane with relatively few guns in public hands, there is less need for police officers to be armed than in countries where gun ownership is less strictly controlled.
A quicker response to armed incidents	Would this stop a Dunblane or Hungerford?
Less Police Casualties	The Cost of supplying firearms and training

Legal discretion.

The discretion of the individual police officer is sacrosanct . Obedience to superior orders shall be no defence if law enforcement officials knew that an order to use force and firearms resulting in the death or serious injury of a person was manifestly unlawful and had a reasonable opportunity to refuse to follow it. The test case on the use of reasonable force is McCann vs. the UK ,heard in the European Court on the deployment of the SAS in 1998 in Gibraltar against an IRA Service Unit. The case upheld the rule of absolute necessity . Gun control in the UK is strong and there is very little public opposition to the strict laws governing gun ownership and use.(Godfrey, H Vanberbilt Political Review 24/9/2012). Policing policy should be made to suit the country being policed; in America more guns in private hands makes police officers having guns a necessity, while in the UK low levels of gun crime makes routinely armed police potentially more of a problem than a solution.

Conclusion

The author's contention is that the current balance of armed to unarmed officers in the UK is correct at this time. While the current terrorist threat is high the overall number of incidents involving firearms is relatively small especially compared to countries such as the USA. The means of deployment are transparent and subject to executive scrutiny and the current experience in Scotland highlights the level of accountability. The balance between armed and unarmed officers exists in a particularly British compromise where deployment of armed officers is left to discretion but this right is only accorded to certain specialist officers. There is an argument about the response time for officers in remoter areas of the UK but the routine deployment of armed officers at strategic locations such as airports appears proportionate and reasonable. The culture of restricted gun licence holders in the UK determines the Police response. The ideal of a largely unarmed police service is tradition that both the police and public wish to retain. The consequences of having a permanently armed force would change the relationship with the public and may even endanger officer's lives.

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1. IDEA This House would arm the police idebate.org/node/17756