

The Seattle Police Department After Action Report

World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference
Seattle, Washington
November 29 – December 3, 1999

Prepared by:
The Seattle Police Department
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Transmittal

This document is transmitted this date, April 4, 2000, from Assistant Chief Clark Kimerer, commander of the Seattle Police Department WTO After Action Report team, to Chief Herbert V. Johnson. The WTO-AAR team was lead by Captain Linda Pierce and staffed by Lieutenants Ted Jacoby and Steve Brown, Senior Planner Mike Quinn, and Graphics Designer Shanna Christie. Captain Jim Pryor was special topics coordinator. Other contributors included Sergeant Scott Bachler, Officers Kevin Grossman, Christie-Lynne Bonner, and Mark Mulvanny, and Department Legal Advisor Leo Poort.

Introduction

This document presents the Seattle Police Department (SPD) After Action Report for the World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference held in Seattle between November 29 and December 3, 1999. While it is recognized that many other groups and agencies may be interested in this report, this document is intended as an After Action Report for the Seattle Police Department.

As such, it conforms to professional standards for reports of this kind. This report does not represent the views of other City agencies or of the numerous allied police agencies that supported the Department during the Conference. The discussion that follows is limited in scope to those issues over which the Department had final authority. Although not all-inclusive, it is comprehensive in the sense that it addresses WTO security plans and the operational dynamics that evolved as the plan was executed. Actions of particular individuals, sworn or otherwise, are referenced only when those actions had broad operational implications.

This WTO After Action Report is organized into four major sections, followed by appendices that provide added detail. These four sections are as follows:

- **Background:** provides a brief introduction to the events, and the sponsoring groups, that brought the WTO Ministerial Conference to Seattle.
- **Planning Process:** provides a full description of the development of multiple plans that were required to support the Conference, with attention to planning processes and participants and well as the substance of those plans.
- **Operations Summary:** provides a detailed chronology and description of security operations during the week of the Conference.
- **Lessons Learned:** provides an objective assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in the plans and the execution of those plans, with a view toward improved performance in future operations.

Executive Summary

The World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference held in Seattle between November 29 and December 3, 1999 confronted the Seattle Police Department (SPD) with civil unrest the likes of which has not been seen in the city for many years. The planning and tactics employed by forces intent on "shutting down the WTO" may come to be recognized as a watershed event for disruptive protest in the new millennium, an event that established the model and standard for similar events in years to come. For this reason, this after action report will be of considerable interest to law enforcement agencies throughout the nation and the world.

It would be easy and self-serving to list the numerous factors that made the WTO Conference a very difficult assignment for the Department and conclude that it was a "mission impossible." But this report must not be regarded as an assembly of self-serving defenses; rather, it is intended to be a professional, candid, and sometimes painful review of the facts, to learn how we can do a better job in the future. This report identifies weaknesses in planning and execution that must be addressed in preparing for similar operations in the future, as well as some things which worked well and should be sustained in future operations.

Summary Operations Assessment

Overall, considering the history, the complexity, and the intensity of the WTO Ministerial event, the Seattle Police Department and its allied agency (mutual aid) partners performed commendably during the WTO Conference. The professionalism and restraint displayed by the police officers, supervisors, and commanders on the "front line," whether posted at venues or assigned to demonstration management or escort duty, was nothing short of outstanding. This review of the WTO event found nothing to rival this single point: without the remarkable poise and performance of front line officers and their supervisors, the WTO Conference event could have concluded far differently than it did. After a start delayed by security concerns in the Convention Center, WTO delegates were able to meet and deliberate, protesters were able to express their views, there were no deaths or serious injuries, and only 92 individuals were seen for mostly minor injuries at area hospitals¹. All of this was achieved in spite of the riotous behavior that threatened to stop the event on Tuesday and Wednesday, November 30-December 1, 1999.

Within this context, SPD acknowledges that, tactically, it was taught a hard lesson by a well-trained and equipped adversary. Despite a dedicated effort to plan for contingencies, the events of November 30 established that the

¹ According to the records of the Seattle Fire Department.

Department's initial planning and staffing were inadequate for handling the situation that confronted the city. Throughout that day, the night, and the day following, SPD and its mutual aid allies fought for control of the streets in the Downtown core and on nearby Capitol Hill. By December 2, order had been restored and there were no further major disruptions.

Lessons Learned: Weaknesses

In examining the planning and execution phases of the WTO Conference event, SPD found numerous weaknesses that will need to be addressed in preparing for similar events in the future.

Assessment of the Situation

Much has been made of the work of the Intelligence Subcommittee, an interagency group designed to gather information and assess any threats to the peaceful conduct of the WTO Conference. As discussed in the body of the report, in addition to the problematic character inherent in all intelligence work, the City's Investigations Ordinance complicated and slowed the work of the subcommittee. In spite of this difficulty, SPD commanders received credible information of a serious threat to the Conference. Received just three weeks prior to the event, SPD commanders did what they could to recruit allied agency support and adjust SPD staffing to address the threat, especially by organizing a small "flying squad" to single out law breakers for arrest and quick removal from the area. As documented in the report, however, this squad was never employed as intended.

In retrospect, SPD commanders put their faith in historical precedent – the Seattle tradition of peaceful protest – in assessing the needs for policing the WTO event. While we needed to think about a new paradigm of disruptive protest, we relied on our knowledge of past demonstrations, concluding that the "worst case" would not occur here.

In trying to understand our experience with the WTO, it is important to note that the initial assumptions made regarding the Conference were predicated on the Department's 1993 experience with the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Conference. This was a reasonable premise. Both APEC and WTO involved economic trade and justice issues. Both were high profile events, even though it was uncertain whether heads of state would attend WTO in any numbers, as they did for the APEC Conference. Most important of all, SPD experience with APEC was a resounding success, and the Department has had a long record of successes with high profile events (e.g., the Goodwill Games). In the final analysis, SPD planners concluded that the WTO would either be a smaller event, if heads of state did not attend in any significant numbers, or a much larger event if the contrary proved true.

During the summer months, as intelligence began to intimate that the WTO might occasion significant protest and demonstrations, SPD did respond as detailed in the report by strengthening its demonstration management capabilities. However, our general theory did not change: Seattle has enjoyed a history of peaceful protest; Seattleites do not deface the places where they live and work; and SPD can handle potential disruptions with existing resources.

Some might well ask, nevertheless, with the media coverage of the Arlington training site used by those planning to disrupt the meetings, how SPD could not have been aware of the new paradigm of disruptive protest? While it is true that the Department did learn something of the tactics it might expect to face, nothing in the long experience of the Department's leadership could have prepared it for the commitment, organization, and tactical sophistication that it faced in the comparatively small number of organizers who were bent on disrupting the WTO Conference.² Among other things, WTO commanders were surprised by the high degree of coordinated action orchestrated using walkie talkies and cell phones; the critical mass achieved with the rapid marshalling of forces from all directions nearly simultaneously on the morning of November 30; the conscious use of hit and run tactics and flanking movements through the day and night to follow; and the effective use of peaceful demonstrators to mask and shield law violators.

In summary, the Department's planning assumptions and analysis underestimated the capability of criminally disruptive forces. This after action report recommends that the City undertake a careful assessment of the effects of its Investigations Ordinance and that SPD commanders include a credible worst case scenario in planning for future events.

Contingency Planning

Without a realistic assessment of the situation, and with precious little time remaining before the Conference was to begin, SPD did not prepare detailed plans to address all contingencies in sufficient depth. As noted above, the most obvious shortfall was a detailed plan for "worst case." For example, and most urgently, SPD did not plan to staff its Demonstration Management platoons after 2200 hours, except through a group comprised of on-duty 911 patrol officers. In addition, while a plan for invoking mutual aid was prepared, there was insufficient attention to the allocation of specific responsibilities ahead of time. As a result, some arriving contingents from mutual aid jurisdictions had to wait idly on the fringes of the WTO area of operations for SPD to determine where and how to deploy them.

² A leader of one of the WTO protest groups is quoted as saying: "To use Seattle as our yardstick is to doom ourselves to failure. . . . Seattle was an incredible confluence of events, campaigns, timing, and organization" (U.S. New & World Report, April 3, 2000, p.24).

SPD had a written contingency plan for re-supply of chemical agents (CS gas). However, some Chemical Agent Response (CART) Teams ran low of preferred munitions and relied on allied agencies for supply until shipments arrived. Additional supplies arrived before any CART Team "ran out" of CS gas munitions. Many officers, however, did exhaust their personal protective OC pepper spray, and there was no written contingency for field replacement of OC spray. These personal OC munitions were never intended to serve as crowd dispersal agents.

Although the WTO Planning Unit did a remarkable job with the time and resources available, logging some 11,600 hours on planning with a very small team, insufficient depth and detailing of contingency plans represents a serious flaw the responsibility for which must ultimately be borne by senior commanders. This after action report recommends preparation of detailed contingency plans to support future operations. In addition, the establishment of a permanent Major Event Planning Unit in the new Special Operations Bureau of SPD is intended to provide an ongoing source of institutional memory and organizational expertise for future undertakings of this kind.

Operational Control

An essential element for the successful execution of any plan is the ability to control operations once officers are deployed. Unfortunately, in several respects the command and control arrangements for WTO broke down early during the operation. Most notably, the SPD Incident Commander in the Seattle Police Operations Center (SPOC) did not know with certainty in near real time who was where and what was happening on the ground. This made it very difficult to maintain effective control from the SPOC.

On the ground, the field Incident Commander for the Demonstration Management platoons was similarly hampered by a too-wide span of control aggravated by the absence of sufficient field support to help control and orchestrate actions on the "front lines." As a result, platoon commanders were frequently required to make decisions on their own. In the most critical of these instances, the "flying squad" redeployed to the Convention Center on the morning of November 30th. Without this unit to arrest key law breakers, SPD missed a crucial opportunity to remove the leadership of the unlawful disruptive element early on the first day of the WTO.

With regard to integrating allied mutual aid agencies into the scheme of maneuver, the lack of radios with compatible frequencies greatly hampered the ability of the SPOC to provide missions and adjust the efforts of allied forces once they were deployed.

To keep this discussion in perspective, it is important to note that SPD gets few opportunities to train and practice execution of special events of the scope and complexity of the WTO Conference. SPD has superb police officers who are highly skilled and effective when operating independently or in small teams; the Department has less experience designing and executing operations where officers are organized into platoon and company-sized formations, as was the case with WTO. The need to integrate allied agencies into the operation merely added to the complexity and difficulty of the task.

To address these critical flaws in command and control, this after action report recommends regular training and exercising of the SPOC and the Incident Command System to orchestrate public safety efforts for large special events.

Logistics

The after action report calls attention to a number of logistical shortfalls observed during the WTO deployment. Most significant, all officers did not have the full array of personal protective equipment required for handling a riot. Many officers did not receive food and water in a timely fashion. Lacking a separate frequency for logistics, it was difficult to get requests for resupply through heavy radio traffic on the Department's operations frequency. It also was difficult to get appropriate transportation to move officers from one venue to another.

The after action report makes specific recommendations to address these shortfalls. In addition, the report recommends the establishment of a Logistics Subcommittee chaired by a lieutenant or captain, to give greater visibility and better integrate planning and operations for logistics.

Lessons Learned: Strengths

In examining the planning and execution phases of the WTO Conference event, SPD found numerous strengths as well as weaknesses. These should be sustained in planning for future events.

Officer and Allied Agency Performance

As asserted above, SPD's front line officers, supervisors, and commanders, enjoying critical support from the Washington State Patrol, the King County Sheriff's Office, and other allied agency partners, quite literally saved the day during the WTO Conference. The discipline and restraint shown by officers assigned to the line under very trying circumstances, working 15 to 18 hour shifts and often going without food and rest breaks, demonstrated the high quality, strength, and training of our regional law enforcement officers.

The role of these officers is often not well understood, particularly in highly emotional circumstances such as those presented by the WTO Conference. The oath sworn by police officers requires them to enforce the laws and maintain public order, to safeguard the basic democratic freedoms of speech and assembly. In the long hours of preparing for the Conference, SPD commanders kept continuously in view the delicate balance that would need to be struck to allow the WTO to meet and deliberate while facilitating the expression of strongly held opposing viewpoints. Throughout the the event itself, officers and commanders on the front line followed through to keep open the lines of communication to those who came to voice legitimate protest at the WTO. However, those who attempted to "shut down the WTO" were, in effect, attempting to deprive WTO delegates of their basic democratic freedoms.

Riot Control Methods and Use of Force

The methods used by SPD to restore order were fully consistent with the police rules regarding the use of force. The two basic guidelines regarding the "continuum of force" demonstrated at WTO are (1) that the force employed must be proportionate to the threat presented and (2) that the officer never relinquishes the right to self-defense.

When presented with the need to reopen the Downtown area and protect the rights of all people, SPD had two basic choices when those obstructing the area refused to obey a lawful police order to disperse: they could use batons, with the potential physical injury that they cause, or they could employ chemical irritants and other less lethal munitions. The use of chemical irritants and other less lethal munitions allowed SPD to open the area, allowing Conference delegates to move among venues while avoiding serious injuries or fatalities. SPD did well to choose the latter course of action.

Specialized Training

Training in crowd control, traffic escort, and chemical agent dissemination (CART Teams) was a strength that should be sustained in planning for future large-scale operations.

Conclusion

What do we need to do differently in the future? While the body of the report and lessons learned will show that there is no simple answer for this question, the major flaws resolve to a matter of planning. *Bottomline:* While the Department worked very hard to develop contingency plans for ensuring a safe and secure setting for the WTO, we did not develop a detailed, well-rehearsed plan for dealing with a "worst case" scenario. In retrospect, we relied too much on our collective memory of recent history ("fighting the last war") and placed too little

credence on intelligence that ultimately proved to be accurate (the "new war"). In the future, SPD must be the bearer of bad news and, quite simply, assert serious misgivings about missions where there is not a realistic expectation of success. Accepting this charge, we will move forward a stronger and wiser police agency, more determined than ever to serve our citizens well.

Background

The World Trade Organization (WTO)

The WTO, which was established in 1995, ". . . is the only international agency overseeing the rules of international trade. Its purpose is to help trade flow smoothly, in a system based on rules, to settle trade disputes between governments, and to organize trade negotiations [see www.wto.org]."

The ongoing work of the WTO takes place in a series of small meetings held during the year at the headquarters of the organization, located in Geneva, Switzerland. Large ministerial meetings, scheduled biennially, allow the trade ministers to gather in a host city to conduct intensive negotiations and reach decisions that govern agreements which are binding on the organization's 134 member nations.

Previous Ministerial Meetings

The first WTO Ministerial meeting was held in Singapore in December 1996. The government of Singapore employed its military to ensure that security for the event was tightly controlled. For example, government support included individually assigned vehicles with military drivers for each attending dignitary. There were no known protests in or around the meeting site.

In contrast to the meeting in Singapore, the Second WTO Ministerial, which was held in Geneva in May 1998, attracted international attention and protest. This meeting coincided with the 50th anniversary of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the WTO's predecessor organization. The second conference also was attended by 20 world leaders, including President Bill Clinton, and was located in a highly accessible European venue.

Security preparations for the Geneva meeting were extensive. Local police and military resources were utilized to secure venues, protect foreign dignitaries, move dignitaries and delegates around the city, and manage the expected protests. A "security zone" was established with concrete barriers, razor wire, metal and plastic fencing, and uniformed police staffing. Only properly credentialed persons could enter the secured perimeter around the meeting site.

This security zone was established before the conference started, thereby preventing demonstrations from accessing the conference venue.

As events unfolded, a large number of protestors appeared in Geneva. Daytime protest activities, including large marches that disrupted traffic, were relatively well organized. Near the site of the ministerial meetings, groups approached police lines and attempted to force entry to the police perimeter. However, protest activity occurred outside the secured perimeter and did not interrupt the Conference.

Some in the crowd broke windows, painted graffiti, and caused other disturbances. During nighttime activity, groups of lawbreakers damaged property, looted businesses, and clashed with police. In response, police used tear gas, water cannons, and made numerous arrests. During the second Conference, President Clinton's proposal for the WTO Ministerial to be held in the United States was accepted.

Seattle Bid Committee

After the Geneva meeting, business and trade proponents in the Seattle area, with support from local public officials, established a Seattle Bid Committee to bring the Third WTO Ministerial to the city. Seattle was one of 40 U.S. cities that expressed interest in hosting the meeting.

During the last quarter of 1998, SPD Assistant Chief Harv Ferguson met on two occasions with members of the Seattle Bid Committee and the City's Office of Intergovernmental Relations (OIR) to discuss bringing the WTO meeting here. Chief Ferguson provided a brief overview of SPD's experience handling major events, including the 1990 Goodwill Games and the 1993 Asian Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Conference. At that time, Bid Committee members expressed the view that the WTO Ministerial would be less of an event than either APEC or the Goodwill Games because no heads of state were expected.

Following the formal announcement by Mayor Schell on January 20, 1999, that Seattle had been awarded the bid to host the WTO, a WTO Public Safety Executive Committee was formed and initiated the planning process.

Seattle Host Organization (SHO)

Once Seattle was named as the site of the 1999 WTO Ministerial, a local host organization called the Seattle Host Organization (SHO) was established. The nucleus of the SHO was the Washington Council on International Trade (WCIT), the Boeing Company, and Microsoft. Together with representatives of City,

County and State Government, SHO formed a largely volunteer organization to plan the event. A subcommittee structure was used to create the conference plan, however, SHO specifically did not want to have a security subcommittee. Instead, some public safety representatives were invited to attend the general steering committee meetings of SHO that were held every other week. The SPD, FBI, and United States Department of State (USDS) regularly sent representatives to these steering committee meetings.

The WTO Secretariat in Geneva worked closely with both the Federal Government and SHO during their planning for the meetings in Seattle, but by the WTO's own request, did not participate in security planning. In several meetings with public safety officials, the WTO stated security was the executive responsibility of local law enforcement. This assertion was repeated in a meeting between the City and USDS in mid-February. Federal representatives emphatically stated that they would resist any attempts by the city to seek reimbursement from the State Department for WTO related expenses incurred by the city. The Seattle Police Department did not receive technical assistance or financial support from the WTO for the security of the Ministerial Conference.

Planning Process

Security planning for the Seattle WTO Ministerial Conference began in mid-February, 1999 and involved agencies representing local, county, and federal jurisdictions. As such, the planning enterprise was a complex, interjurisdictional undertaking, with the Seattle Police Department playing the lead role. SPD planners committed over 11,600³ hours preparing for the Conference. Planners attended numerous meetings of SHO, the City Council Public Safety Committee, the Mayor's Office, as well as other planning subcommittee meetings.

Additionally, SPD Crime Prevention personnel and West Precinct command staff briefed the Downtown Seattle Association, the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA), the West Precinct Private Security Forum, the Human Service Provider Forum, and construction sites/developers to alert them to potential impacts by demonstrations. The context of these meetings was general preparedness for any disaster or emergency, to include the possibility of property damage due to unlawful demonstrations. Representatives of the City and SPD planners and Incident Commanders met extensively with the protest organizers in the months leading up to WTO. Meetings were also held with the National Lawyers Guild and the ACLU where public safety issues were discussed. Immediately prior to the event, police commanders met with representatives from announced protest groups. For the planned marches, police commanders met with the Sierra Club, Washington Association Council of Churches, and AFL-CIO to ensure safe and successful processions.

WTO Mission Statement

The formal mission statement given to WTO planners is stated succinctly in the Public Safety Committee Operations Plan: "... to provide prompt efficient and appropriate public safety service to Conference attendees and citizens of the Puget Sound region." The principal tasks associated with the mission statement were:

- Provision of security for Conference facilities (called venues);
- Provision of VIP escort services and dignitary protection;
- Provision of traffic management services
- Provision of demonstration management services for protest activity.

Early in the planning process, the scope of the event was uncertain. Planning focused on traffic management and dignitary protection as dignitaries would need to move among venues. Planning later focused on demonstration management when it became clear that the Conference would likely attract protest activity.

³ Training hours as recorded by SPD Timekeeping Unit

Planners were faced with difficult tasks of balancing the requirement to provide a safe and secure conference environment, the creation of a virtual foreign embassy for 134 countries in downtown Seattle, and with the equally important goal of establishing a public safety plan conducive to full, free, and legal expression by critics of the WTO and its policies. In addition, the planners were confronted with the requirement to ensure that the movement of citizens involved in downtown commerce, seasonal shopping, or other ordinary activities would be minimally impacted.

Public Safety Planning Participants

Planning for public safety at the WTO Ministerial Conference was a three-tiered process: Public Safety Executive Committee, Public Safety Committee, and Public Safety Subcommittees. These committees and the SPD WTO Planning Unit were presented with the task of coordinating multiple agencies to provide a safe and secure environment for the conference.

Public Safety Executive Committee

On February 12, 1999, the Public Safety Executive Committee was established. The Committee was comprised of command representatives from the following agencies:

- Seattle Police Department - Chief Norm Stamper
(Delegated to Assistant Chief Edward Joiner)
- King County Sheriff's Office - Sheriff David Reichert
(Delegated to Assistant Chief Jackson Beard)
- Seattle Fire Department - Chief James Sewell
- Washington State Patrol - Chief Annette Sandberg
- FBI - SAC Burdena Pasenelli
- U.S. Secret Service - SAC Ronald Legan

Public Safety Committee

On March 11, 1999, the Public Safety Executive Committee announced it had formed a working group, the Public Safety Committee (PSC). The PSC was an interjurisdictional organization established to coordinate the public safety planning for the Conference. Representatives from local, state, and federal public safety agencies comprised the Committee, with the Seattle Police Department designated as the lead agency. SPD Assistant Chief Ed Joiner was designated as chair of the group. The Public Safety Committee met twice per month until mid-September, when the group began meeting weekly. The interjurisdictional agencies involved in the PSC were as follows:

