I t is frequently asserted that there has recently been a dramatic expansion of private security in Britain. This expansion, it is held, has been fuelled by growing fear of crime and falling confidence in the ability of the public police service to respond effectively. Moreover, it is sometimes argued that the public police face a bleak future in which they will be increasingly undercut by for-profit security companies providing policing services for those who can afford to pay. Despite the many claims, however, there remains relatively little empirical evidence about the growth of the industry over recent years, and about how the boundaries between public and private policing work in practice.

The growth of private security

Trevor Jones and Tim Newburn look at a burgeoning industry.

We have recently published the findings of the first major empirical study of the private security industry in Britain.[1] In our survey we found a broad and eclectic industry, perhaps employing up to a third of a million people. When talking of private security there is a tendency to focus solely on its most visible sector: uniformed guarding. Our study suggested that, though important, this is only one part of a very large and diverse industry which also covers the manufacture and installation of electronic security equipment (eg. CCTV and electronic alarm systems) and mechanical security equipment (eg. locks, bars and bolts), private investigation, debt collection and bailiffing. In terms of market size, the guarding sector represents only a quarter of the total industry, with the most rapidly expanding area being that of electronic security equipment.

How recent is this growth? The

"It is this growing demand which underpins the constant and pervasive feeling of under-resourcing within the police service."

Census of Population occupational estimates for employment suggests that there has indeed been a substantial increase in the numbers of people employed in security occupations since the 1950s, a rise of over 240 per cent. However, we should point out that the most rapid expansion occurred during the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, the figures suggest that security employment probably overtook that in public constabularies during the 1960s. Since 1970, security occupations and the public police have been growing at a similar rate.

A growing demand

There have been a number of explanations for the rise in private policing. One concerns financial constraints on public policing that result in demand for policing services outstripping supply, with the private sector expanding to fill the gap. In fact, expenditure on policing has expanded significantly in real terms, especially since the late 1970s. However, this expansion has not kept pace with the growth in police workload. Whether measured by the volume of reported crime, calls for police assistance, reported incidents or administrative burdens, it is clear that the demands for policing services have continued to accelerate and outstrip supply. Indeed, these demands have been so great that it is unlikely that any realistic increase in police expenditure could have allowed the police service to meet them. It is this growing demand which underpins the constant and

pervasive feeling of under-resourcing within the police service.

However, there is no simple relationship between resources and provision. First, the 'great leap' in private security employment seems to have occurred in the 1960s - rarely thought of as the period when public policing resources were at their most stretched. Secondly, the most rapidly expanding part of the private security industry has been electronic surveillance, hardly a part of the 'market' in which the public police service would be expected to compete. Our explanation of the growth of private security must, therefore, take in other factors.

A second line of inquiry concerns the Conservative government's broader privatisation policies of the 1980s and early 1990s. Although the then government turned the full force of its reforming zeal upon the police service somewhat later than in other public services, when it did so it seemed that the results might be equally far reaching. Indeed, during the early 1990s, the police service was reeling from the announcement of a cluster of reviews and official reports into policing, many written within the free-market perspective espoused by successive governments since 1979. Indeed, important policing functions have been privatised in recent years. Two of the most visible examples are the prisoner escort service (and guarding duties within courts), along with the privatisation of parking controls in

many local authority areas. These have clearly contributed to the growing visibility of the private security industry. However, whilst radical changes have often been mooted, in practice privatisation of policing has been relatively limited and certainly not extensive enough to explain the large growth in private security over the longer period.

The quiet revolution

A third distinct explanation for the rise of private security has been suggested by the Canadian sociologists Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning[2]. They have suggested that it is changes in the wider system of property relations which underpins what they argue is a 'quiet revolution' which is transforming policing in many western societies. In particular, they focus on the rise of what they call 'mass private property' - shopping centres, large educational and work complexes, leisure parks, hospitals and private housing developments - all owned by private corporations but 'public' in that they are all, to a greater or lesser extent, open to large numbers of people. According to this argument, it is the growth of these kinds of spaces - outside the 'natural domain' of public constabularies - which has been the primary force behind the growing extent and pervasiveness of private security.

Our study suggested that mass private property has certainly grown in importance in Britain since the 1950s, and has certainly had some important implications for the way that everyday life is policed. In particular, the retail sector saw significant changes during the 1980s, with the growth of large shopping centres and 'out-of-town' retail parks, policed in the main by private security. However, it is important to note that there has been a significant slow-down in these developments since the early 1990s. Furthermore, as a result of local government intervention and limited land availability, development of other examples of mass private property has been substantially more limited in Britain than in North America. We are still some way from Mike Davis' pessimistic image of the gated and privatised communities of contemporary Los Angeles[3].

This suggested to us that contemporary developments in

policing cannot straightforwardly be explained by reference to fiscal constraints, or simply to developments in urban space. Both have undoubtedly contributed to the rise of private policing, but neither tells the full story on its own. Furthermore, developments in property relations and growing pressures on national states appear to be connected to a raft of social, political, economic and cultural changes identifiable across many societies in the late 20th century. 'Policing' is increasingly undertaken by a range of bodies and agencies, both public and private, and the policing 'division of labour' is increasingly complex. However, because of their general functional, geographical and spatial boundaries, the public police are increasingly stretched and suffering in comparison with more specialised providers in the 'marketplace'.

If current developments continue, we face the prospect of an increasingly over-stretched public police struggling alongside an increasing array of private providers meeting the demands of those who can pay. It is clear that the provision of public safety can be, and increasingly is being, undertaken by a diverse network of providers. However, if the worst excesses of the free-market in security provision are to be avoided such networks need to be located within the sphere of local democratic decision-making. It is the public police, with their historical and continuing links with the institutions of local and national democracy, which must play a key role in the future in ensuring that the provision of policing is consistent with the public good. ■

Trevor Jones is Lecturer in Criminology, Centre for Law and Society, University of Edinburgh and Tim Newburn is Joseph Rowntree Professor of Urban Social Policy, Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Footnotes:
1. Trevor Jones and Tim Newburn (1998) *Private Security and Public Policing.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.
2. Clifford Shearing and Philip Stenning (1981) 'Modern Private Security: Its Growth and Implications'. In Tonry, M., and Morris, N. (eds) *Crime and Justice: An Annual Review of Research.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
3. Mike Davis (1988) *City of Quartz.* London: Vintage.

Managing risk

Peter Harraway describes the development of probation/police information exchanges in London.

Until recently, criminal justice agencies have tended to "operate within their silos", primarily focusing on moving information around within the organisation, and not on helping relevant information flow across boundaries to enhance and support operational work.

This article describes and considers recent initiatives between the Metropolitan Police and the 5 London probation services to change this, and to enhance the risk assessment and management of potentially dangerous offenders.

The pilot

Initially, in 1996/7 a successful pilot took place whereby the probation service in a specific London borough exchanged identifier details on a small number of high risk cases with police in the local Division, and police exchanged identifiers on a small number of offenders targeted for active police work. A formal protocol was subsequently signed between an Assistant Commissioner and the Chief Probation Officers of the 5 London probation services in 1997, and the process started to spread to other Divisions. The purpose of the protocol is to enhance public safety through sharing information for the detection and prevention of serious crime by potentially dangerous people, and to improve working relationships between police and probation at organizational and local levels, The aim was to open up channels for more detailed information to be exchanged, and for both organisations to benefit

"The purpose of the protocol is to enhance public safety through sharing information for the detection and prevention of serious crime by potentially dangerous people."

Kirsty Cunningham
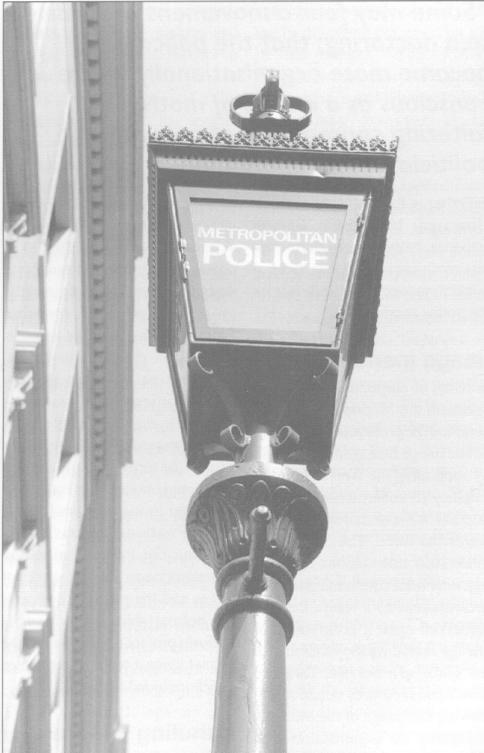
from the others' information.

Ownership of information exchanged remains with the originating agency, whose consent is needed before any further disclosure can be made. Disclosures to third parties would be exceptions to the policy of confidentiality, and require justification on the basis of the harm which non-disclosure might otherwise cause, and would be part of the overall plan for managing risk in any particular case.

Sex offenders

The Sex Offenders Act 1997 introduced a massive registration and assessment task for the police, which involved both the probation services and the local authorities, and led to a re-focusing of information exchanges within a new context of formal Divisional Risk Management Meetings, where information on sex offenders was shared between the agencies, and joint risk management plans agreed.

The large numbers of sex offenders involved (some of whom were already assessed as high risk

by the probation services) can mean that attention is focused on them rather than other potentially dangerous offenders, although the Risk Management Meeting structure does include the latter within the terms of reference being developed in Divisions. The existing protocol was important In developing the Risk Management Meeting structures.

The essence of information exchanges is not to flood other agencies with data, but to carefully select those cases where a potential high risk has been identified by the risk assessment procedures used in the agency. Police and Probation do not necessarily identify the same people, and therein is the value of the exchange.

Improving risk assessment

Probation often has information not known to police which leads to an assessment of high risk. Similarly, police have information not known to probation which may significantly modify the risk assessment carried out by probation. By putting it together

the risk assessment and subsequent management of the case is improved.

A few examples illustrate this. Probation were supervising a serious sex offender who appeared to be doing well on a sex offender groupwork programme. However, a police-mounted surveillance indicated that the individual's behaviour in the community showed likely relapse. Without this information, the probation officer supervising would have managed the risk less effectively than she did. In another example, probation information and suspicions that a parolee's injuries had been sustained in the course of crime were conveyed to police - the outcome being that he was charged and convicted of offences of rape. In another example, a supervisee worked as a mini-cab driver - and his sexual offences against children had been carried out in cars, The Risk Management Meeting decided to request the man's resignation from this employment or inform the employer. (The supervisee resigned).

Confidentiality concerns

There were concerns initially arising from a "confidentiality" culture in both organisations. In fact probation officers accepted the legitimacy of sharing information on serious offenders with police, and police recognised that probation would not disclose police information inappropriately. Some issues, for example the information given to the offenders subject to the exchanges, are still under discussion. Trust grew, and continues to be nurtured by the regular contacts now established through the RMMs and through operational teams using their contacts routinely. Probation service input on police risk assessment training courses has developed, and police are now using more structured risk assessment methods. In turn, police are better able to respond to incidents where probation staff and others may be at particular risk.

The building of the structures to support this in each Division is

currently on-going and includes the relevant Local Authority as members of the meeting, To support the processes, a media protocol was recently agreed between the 5 London probation services and the police to control and govern wider disclosures, and in particular disclosures to the press,

The 5 London probation services share a common IT infrastructure, and work is in progress to enable secure email connectivity between the 5 services and the Metropolitan Police to support the Risk Management Meetings and provide benefits of improved timeliness and greater security. Once implemented, a shared risk management database becomes a reality.

New opportunities

The focus has so far been on cases where the potential risk of serious harm is high, and on improving joint approaches to reducing and managing this risk and committing resources to this purpose. Commitment to information exchanges is high, and practice is developing rapidly as the agencies involved are learning that risk management has to be a shared task. The opportunity exists however to develop the exchanges to include offenders who whilst not posing a high potential risk of serious harm, are identified as persistent and at high risk of re-offending, This could include a number of young offenders on whom the work of the planned multi-agency Youth Offending Teams would be targeted, as well as older offenders under supervision in the community. The cultural changes being brought about through the RMMs and the recognition that the agencies involved both need to and can share relevant information safely, will underpin the wider task of multi-agency crime reduction strategies, and the shape this will take under the Crime and Disorder Act. ∎

Peter Harraway is Chief Information Systems Officer with the Inner London Probation Service.