

RSOG Seminar: **“MAKING THE PUBLIC SAFE: NYC COMPSTAT, STOP AND FRISK, AND COOKING THE BOOKS”**

with

Professor William Eimicke

School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University

When : 14 December 2012
Where : Razak School of Government
Who : Prof. William Eimicke

About The Seminar

According to the National Key Result Area statistics on Crime Reduction that were released in July this year, there was an 11% drop in crime rates from the year 2010 to 2011 and a further 39.7% drop in street crimes. Nonetheless, Malaysians are still increasingly concerned about personal safety as there are many shared experiences among the public on snatch theft, kidnapping attempts and break-ins. This divide from numbers and reality has further fueled the debate about the perceived sense of security and safety in Malaysia.

Social scientists have endlessly debated about reducing crime through effective policing and penalty versus improving the environment - incentivisation and uplifting socioeconomic conditions. This debate was put to a test when former New York Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani came into power and appointed William J. Bratton as his police commissioner to bring down crime in the city.

The seminar delved into an in-depth discussion of the rapid success of New York City's performance in reducing crime. Issues such as aggressive policing and statistics manipulation were examined in retrospect to the policies carried out by the mayor and the police commissioner.

Summary

Eimicke began the seminar by describing New York City as Hollywood's inspiration for famous crime movies and series. The city that has spawned countless movies and long running crime series was a hotbed for criminal activities two decades ago. It was considered one of the most dangerous cities in the world where there were more than 500,000 serious crimes committed in 1990. Upon winning his mayoral seat based on the campaign slogan of bringing down crime, Giuliani took a radical approach in combating crime. He and his then newly appointed police commissioner focused on implementing the strategy of 'broken windows', a criminology theory which is to keep a well-ordered and safe urban environment.

"If you ignore the minor crimes – jumping turnstiles (subway fare evasion), graffiti, public drinking, the 'squeegee men', beggars – it creates an environment for the disrespect of the law. People involved in minor crimes are connected to perpetrators of serious crimes and can graduate to serious crimes. Giuliani focused on prevention rather than apprehension.

"He also invested a lot of money for a data base that could churn out crime statistics. CompStat produced statistics every week and it could look at the overall trend of crimes and help the police look into the origins of crime and the trouble spots to tackle. The police department's management was given an overhaul where the officers were held accountable to the crime rate, rather than an arrest rate," said Eimicke.

The zero tolerance policing policy adopted by Giuliani and Bratton and the assistance of CompStat helped reduce crime dramatically and by 2011, crime has been reduced by 79.66% since 1990. The success was continued till recently, where there is now a slight spike of crime rate – though still significantly smaller than in 1990.

Eimicke explained that having a tougher policy and changing the style of management came with consequences and challenges. During the first two years of the new policies, the administration received a 50% increase of public complaints in relation to highly publicised police over-reactions such as 'stop and frisk' which allowed police officers to stop and frisk anyone within reasonable suspicion that he or she might be armed and dangerous. The success of the New York City Police was also questioned as it was accused of 'cooking the books' – doctoring of crime reported. To overcome this controversy, an independent audit unit was brought in to verify the statistics.

Issues Raised

- 1 Community engagement between the police and the public. Based on the New York City example, there was very little community engagement in policing policy.

2 The rise of crime rate is not correlated to the economy. New York City's economy was poor from 1990-1995 and in 2001, yet crime rate was dropping significantly.

3 There is no 'one size fits all' policy to bring down crime. Various policies of the New York City's example could be incorporated, depending on the environment.

About the Speaker

William B. Eimicke is the founding director of the Picker Center for Executive Education of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs. The Picker Center runs the School's Executive MPA program, university partnerships, and non-degree professional training programs. Eimicke teaches courses in public management, applied policy analysis, and management innovation.

Eimicke served as the Deputy Fire Commissioner for Strategic Planning and Policy from 2007 through the spring of 2010. He led numerous innovations to reduce response time to fires, establish a computerized risk-based inspection program, and provide advanced management training for senior Fire and EMS officers (FOMI). The FDNY Officers Management Institute (FOMI) was designated as a Top 50 Innovations in American Government for 2008 and 2009 by the Kennedy School of Government.

Contact

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