



# INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

*An initiative of  
the National Academy of Public Administration,  
and the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs  
and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice,  
Princeton University*

Oral History Program

Series:

Policing

Interview no.:

A1

Interviewee: Bruce Baker

Interviewer: Gordon Peake

Date of Interview: 7 December 2007

Location: Coventry University  
Coventry  
United Kingdom

Innovations for Successful Societies, Bobst Center for Peace and Justice  
Princeton University, 83 Prospect Avenue, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544, USA  
[www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties](http://www.princeton.edu/successfulsocieties)

PEAKE: It's December 7, 2007 and I'm in Coventry with Bruce Baker, Professor of African Politics at Coventry University. Bruce, a couple of things before we begin. First of all, I want to thank you for your time but secondly I want to confirm for the record that you have read, attested and signed to the release of material in connection with this project.

BAKER: *And inwardly digested. I have. I do.*

PEAKE: Thank you. Before we get into the substance of the interview, I'd like to begin by talking a little bit about your own personal history, how you came to work on policing, work about policing.

BAKER: *About seven years ago I went to South Africa to teach for a term at Rhodes University and in the course of my time in Grahamstown in Eastern Cape, I was looking through very Eurocentric eyes at what was going on around me in terms of policing which was shock and horror. This was my first exposure to non-state policing, other than commercial policing. So I saw in the town center that car parking was regulated by an un-uniformed group of, just a local association of unemployed people who didn't quite demand money, but took money off people and protected the cars. So I was struck by that.*

*I was struck by the fact that up in the shanty towns the police were rarely seen but there were street committees and other such organizations who dealt quite severely with cases of rape. While I was there there was an example where an alleged rapist had been summoned to the street committee to give account, had refused to attend, had been summoned again, had refused to attend. So the street, or just the street committee, had destroyed his shack.*

*Interestingly, one of the people I was interviewing later who was a member of the street committee was a policeman who clearly didn't have any problems between, on the one hand during his official duties, doing it a la state police manual, but when he was out there on the shanty town where there were none of his colleagues, no state police presence, he assumed this other role of concerned citizen dealing with crime in the absence of the state.*

*Then I saw examples of a hold up, an armed hold up at a garage near the center of the town. It was the security guards, commercial security guards, that seized the armed raiders, handcuffed them, bundled them into a 'backy', one of these open-backed vans, and drove them to the police and presented them, fait accompli to the police: 'Here are the robbers, they've been duly arrested, we're handing them over to you, all you've got to do is take it from here'. So all of this came as a big shock to a Eurocentric person like myself who thought somewhat naively that policing was done by the police or maybe by security corporations as well.*

*So I got interested, thinking, what's going on here? I realized that almost all of the work up until then, on policing in Africa had been written by jurists and legal minds, and political scientists hadn't made any comment at all; whereas as a political scientist I found it absolutely amazing. What was the role of the state? I felt that as a political scientist, I had some sort of contribution to make. So that's really where it began. Ever since I have not ceased to be fascinated by the state/nonstate boundary.*

PEAKE: You've worked in a number of African countries on these issues. I wonder if you can talk a little bit about it, focusing specifically on some of the instances in which your work has—some of the situation where you've work alongside, in close proximity to international organizations, international donor like the United Nations and bilateral donors and development banks.

BAKER: *I worked briefly in Mozambique, that must have been six or seven years ago and we were looking at policing there, state policing. I think it was DFID that was doing training there on human rights, human rights training for young police cadets in their police academy. So my experience there was of what I regard as the naiveté of donors in—I don't know if this is quite answering your question—but the response there was the naiveté of donors seeking in an incredibly short course, I can't remember how many weeks it was, as part of their training. They did human rights training whereupon it was deemed that because they had the training they had learned a whole completely different approach to human rights to that which they had been brought up with under their parents or in their schools or in their culture.*

*The idea that you could suddenly change a male chauvinist into a gender-aware, sensitive, caring, service orientated, young policeman I found quite surprising, with the short time of the course. The total lack of appreciation that when that young man or woman would go to the police station that of course he would be under the command of the local police commander who was clearly going to tell him, "Now, listen young man/woman, I don't care what you've learned there at college, you do what I tell you to do here." If he were to try and combat that and to insist on sticking to his training requirements, even assuming he wanted to, there was clearly going to be not much in the way of career prospects for him.*

*So that alerted me to the fact that training is not learning and that learning without support and without even attempting to change the whole structure and culture of a police force is going to be extremely limited.*

*Let me think, working with international organizations. All that comes to mind now, is to speak about Liberia. When I was in Rwanda, Uganda, Sierra Leone, I was mostly working amongst non-state policing organizations and had fairly minimal contact with international organizations - maybe not in Sierra Leone. In Liberia, yes, there I had quite a bit of contact with UNPOL, the United Nations Mission in Liberia had initial responsibility from the 2003 Comprehensive Peace Agreement to reform the police. Again, I had fairly negative views about what they achieved. I don't doubt their sincerity and their concern to do good, but I do doubt the actual degree of achievement of their efforts.*

*There were a number of problems I found associated with that. One was in the area of vetting. I found it quite surprising that really, with no consultation at all with the Liberian police, the rules of the game were drawn up by UNPOL. They had such enormous negative consequences on the police force. So they said that any policeman over 55 was out, anyone over 25 years service was out. Anyone whose education requirements were not deemed appropriate for the level of rank that the police officer was out - unless they were female for then they would get additional educational training and support. If anyone had human rights abuses on their records, then they were out.*

*Now, firstly, this was obviously a scheme that was quite unworkable. It is really not quite as straightforward as it was done to hope to weed out the human rights abuses. As illustrated in Liberia, of course, the only method that they could think*

---

*of was to give the list of police candidates, or of existing police officers, to NGOs who were involved in human rights abuses and to say, "Do you recognize any of these names?" Well, apart from the fact that, of course, in war, many folks assume different names; apart from the fact that in war there is a lot of disruption, internal migration; and apart from the fact that there were few records kept; that as a process, the only process, of vetting for human rights abuses seems to me to be totally inadequate.*

*Then I think donors really have to go and revisit this, 'we want to remove the bad apples' approach. If you chuck out the experienced officers, for all of their inadequacies and corruption, and replace them with what Liberia has done, with young, raw recruits, 18 year olds, I find it hard to be convinced that those 18 year olds can just assume the commands that have been lost by the removal of the experienced people. So I would ask donors to re-think that one and whether you don't have to live with people who are a bit "iffy" and "dodgy" but have experience on their hands, while you are training up a new cadre of police. That seems to be something worth revisiting.*

*The 'consultation' thing, again, needs to be revisited too I think. It was fascinating to talk to UNPOL and then speak to the senior command in the Liberia National Police and note the mismatch between their interpretation of what had happened. So, on the one hand, I think sincerely that UNPOL felt that they had undertaken consultation and that they hadn't just launched in on their various projects of reforming the curriculum at the police academy and the rest. But when you spoke to the actual academy director, or when you spoke to the senior officers in the Liberian National Police, their actual perception was so, so different.*

*For instance, the academy director felt that at one fell swoop most of his senior trainers had been removed. Much of the material in the courses and the programs had been altered. The new courses had been just imposed on him. Now, I'm sure the United Nations didn't see it that way. Maybe the guy was exaggerating to me, but it was that which he actually felt. He felt he'd just been rubbished and humbled. That was true at the level of the senior command in the Liberian National Police as well. Their perception was that the United Nations, yes, had consulted them if you took consultation to be: they would present you with large documents, and voluminous pieces of paper to be read in a very, very short time and then to be approved at the next meeting, the next day. The Liberian officers just felt absolutely overwhelmed by the content, by the vastness of it and the limited time to read it through and felt in the end they were just being asked to say "Yes, Sir," or "No, Sir," and tick the boxes and to agree because they really couldn't digest it.*

*So a fascinating mismatch between what is consultation and sadly of course, the reality is that genuine consultation takes an awful lot of time that perhaps donors haven't got a lot of. So consultation was an area of concern. Then my mind has gone blank for a minute, so give me another question to think on.*

PEAKE: I'd like to explore this consultation issue further. One of the elements in sort of consultation, about consultation I'd like to talk about which is one of the core goals of a lot of police reform activities is community oversight, community input, community consultation with the state police. So in a number of countries in which I've read about, I don't know if these are the same countries in which you've worked, there are efforts on the part of reformers to set up safety fora, public safety fora, in which the goal of that is, for the first time, for the public to

---

interact with the police. Is this something that you've looked at and worked on and worked with?

**BAKER:** *Yes, community policing. I was fascinated by its failings and inadequacies in Sierra Leone when I was working there for a couple of months. I actually went back there to examine it in more detail and actually looked at it in some detail in Rwanda, Uganda and Liberia. So let's talk about the Sierra Leone experience which I think epitomizes what often is the case with donors.*

*Community policing, which is a very vague concept, was readily embraced by the police. I think for obvious reasons. As they saw it, 'this is going to make our workload a lot easier'. This means we can still stay in charge. This is a cynical position, but this is how I read it. I think the police saw it as 'we can continue to stay more or less station-based and rather than being hammered as in the past for our inadequacies in terms of intelligence gathering, now we have a system being set up by the donors whereby all the intelligence just drops in our lap and all of the criminals are brought to us, and all of the drug dens are identified. Really this takes a lot of pressure off us because it's now done for us by the community. What we've got to do is just process the criminals that they bring to us'. So that's how I understand why the police of Liberia and Sierra Leone were so keen to embrace it. This looked like a perfect scenario.*

*Given that in both those countries there's a lot of negative attitudes towards the police - because of their abuses in the war, their long history of being hardly user friendly. So if this, as the donors told them, is going to improve their image and make them appear to be, or make them really seem to be service orientated and public servants rather than authoritarian brutes, then again, they were ready to embrace anything which polished up their image a bit.*

*So in both countries, there was very broad welcome and appeal of community policing. But what was fascinating was to see how, when more was asked of the police than that, it began to fall foul. It quickly became apparent in Sierra Leone that after the initial efforts of setting up these community forums, they were not sustained by police presence. The police began to tail off in their regular attendance at these meetings. It was just another meeting to direct themselves to. They felt too busy to do it. So that became problematic.*

*Secondly, I think in both countries, community policing has always been handed out to very junior officers, frequently as a "this is not the important issue. So someone who is lower down in the ranks of the police station, let them handle it because this is touchy, feely stuff". Often women police officers handled this.*

*Then that had all the problems of them not having actually much authority. And when they reported back, not having much clout. So almost immediately, in both countries, it got relegated to something that was done, a box that could be ticked, but it wasn't treated very seriously.*

*Then the third area that instantly ran into problems, although they could have learned this from South Africa's history, was the total misunderstanding between the communities themselves who thought they were being asked to set the agenda of what were their priorities for policing, and the police who saw it as telling the community, "This is what we're going to do, just help us to do it." That was really epitomized for me when I went to one meeting of these community police in Freetown, Sierra Leone.*

---

*The meeting had been called after initiation of this forum, to draw up the agenda for crime prevention in this neighborhood. It was, according to the police, a crime-infested neighborhood. So there was a lot of interest and a lot of people gathered at this meeting, a large number of people including a lot of the youth who were very excited at the prospect of telling the police, 'these are the problems in this community. It has never been dealt with by the police before, but here's our chance and we're going to tell you what needs to be done'.*

*Great, so they were rubbing their hands in glee. There was a lot of excitement at the meeting. The police turned up and they handed out these sheets of paper and we quickly discovered the police, prior to starting the meeting, were providing people with what the agenda would be for the next year. So there was no space left at all in the meeting for the community to tell the police. The police just came with their photocopies: 'this is the agenda, do you approve it?'. And immediately you saw, not so much malice on the part of the police but a total incomprehension. It just wasn't within their mentality to grasp the concept that a 'bunch of amateurs and youths', just ordinary people could tell professionals how to police. It was more at that level. This incredulity that it could be anything other than here's the police expertise being used to help the community; here you are, this is the agenda. Isn't it a good idea? They genuinely thought that's what it was about.*

*Yet, clearly, from the text books that really is not what community policing is about. I could go on but it's that sort of story over and over again. I see the police forces very rapidly losing interest. It's something that demands time and I see communities rapidly losing interest in a police force that doesn't listen to their agenda, doesn't give them resources, often doesn't give them any space to meet and only uses them to help the police get a better reputation but not to serve the community. So I see disillusionment coming on fast.*

PEAKE: Thank you. You mentioned a more negative case where the community police force did not work. Is there any case that you can think about where there actually was a useful outcome from them? If there wasn't, there wasn't, you're looking skeptical.

BAKER: *I did hear that in one community forum, in Freetown, they had identified all of what they would call the 'drug dens' and reported them to the police so the police would know where they were. But I'm not hopeful the police would have followed up on that in Freetown. Certainly in Liberia I knew for sure that a similar exercise had happened, the community identified the drug dens, but the police were refusing to deal with it because, so the story went, they were in collusion with the drug sellers. So off-hand I can't think of a success story when it is in that sort of format.*

PEAKE: Thank you. I'd like to move on to talk about this issue of non-state security groups. My first question would you, it is based on the statement you said you've been working on this issue for a number of years. What does the phrase "non-state security groups" actually mean to you? Who or what is included in the definition.

BAKER: *I think it's interesting. My own definition has probably changed over the years through experience. Initially, as I described to you my South African experience, I was seeing people who had, so I thought initially, no connection with the police. Yet one of my illustrations show that there was an informal connection. Here was an off-duty policeman actually being part of a vigilante group. So that should*

---

*have alerted me sooner to the fact that there are formal and informal relationships. It's quite easy when you're interviewing some of the youth groups in Sierra Leone or Liberia to assume that they're totally detached from the police. Even in commercial policing, the managers tell you by and large that they have no contact with the police and the police despise them and don't share information, and hardly ever work with them on a joint operation, etc. But I think the more time I spent with so-called non-state policing, I found that that doesn't quite capture what it is I'm observing.*

*What I seem to be observing in Africa is that every-day policing is done by groups that are not formally appointed and instituted by the state to carry out policing duties, but that nevertheless have all sorts of levels of integration with the police. They may be personal, at the informal level that the commander of a local police station knows that the only way to get the rifle that has been stolen from his policeman, somewhat to his embarrassment. Anyway, to get it back is to get on the phone to the local anti-crime group and say, "We've got a bit of a problem here, can you get this for me?" "No problem". There on his desk the next morning is the weapon of the policeman.*

*So sometimes this is a personal relationship. But also I found there's often all sorts of links in formalized ways as well. There can be cooperation and exchange. I think it's fairly standard across Africa that the police having so little presence and intelligence of the rural areas, that if there's any crime that they want to investigate will instantly go to the customary chiefs and say, "We have a problem, we're looking for this person, do you know anything about it? Can you help us out?"*

*The more I've looked at it, almost all the so-called non-state policing groups are not actually perfectly autonomous at all. The relationship with the police may often be hostile and conflictual, but at the same time it can be cooperative. In a group it may change from case-to-case. So the police aren't averse to letting non-state police groups look after large areas which they cannot touch. They're not averse to letting youth groups get stuck into the shanty towns of the cities. Knowing that they are adverse themselves to going in there because it's dangerous and they haven't got the personnel to do it and that by and large these local groups can deliver what is required.*

*So I've discovered that 'non-state' doesn't quite capture it as such. These are not normally formalized, not normally officially approved groups. And yet, they're not totally beyond contact with either the state or the state police.*

PEAKE: You've mentioned a couple of examples, general examples of youths in shanty towns working on safety and security issues in which the police feared to tread and you also mentioned the case of the police officer going to retrieve the gun by contacting community leaders. I wonder if I can press you a little bit and ask you for some specific instances from your research about how this state – non-state relationship, albeit you admit that the relationship is more dynamic and complicated by that, has actually worked. Some specific examples about where the state police have worked with nonstate entities and vice versa.

BAKER: *Let's take for instance another country. Let's go to Southern Sudan. There we found examples of the police, and it seemed to be a fairly regular occurrence, taking cases to the customary courts because the police, or the magistrates from whom they came, felt themselves overwhelmed and felt that speedier justice could be handled by the customary courts and they saw no problem with taking it*

---

*to those situations. It's not at all unfamiliar in Africa for sometimes an individual police officer to take a case to elders or religious leaders because they know those elders and religious leaders will be personally inclined to try and sort that case out amongst themselves before their own group gets regarded as having a bad reputation by the wider community. So it is in the interests of the elders and the religious leaders to sort out one of their own internal problems amongst themselves.*

*And the policeman who takes it to them will not only secure a very rapid and effective resolution of the problem, but will also probably get some pecuniary reward as well. So that's at an individual level. Ask me the question again?*

PEAKE: You, I'll put it another way which is, you're talking about Southern Sudan where the police were bringing cases to customary institutions, let me explore this issue further with you. What particular types of cases were being brought? Was there a ceiling in which this far and no further type of cases were being brought? And what type of sanction was being laid down by these customary institutions for the crimes that were brought before them?

BAKER: *I think there probably was a ceiling in practice. I don't know whether the customary chiefs in Southern Sudan or anywhere else would necessarily strictly abide by the law, but I think there was a working rule that serious crimes, the murders, the rapes, etc., had to be dealt with by the police unless there were extremely pressing circumstances why they wanted to hush it up and keep it away from the police. So I think yes, we're dealing normally with what we would call lesser crimes.*

PEAKE: You've talked about the things that you've observed as a researcher. I'd like to broaden this out a little bit and talk about the relationship between international organizations and these non-state groupings, this very dynamic, changing, changeable collection of entities. Can you give any observations based upon your own experience and your own seeing this in action about how international organizations regard this non-state form of policing?

BAKER: *I think in Liberia and Sierra Leone, they're extremely suspicious of the merits of customary structures.*

PEAKE: Why is that?

BAKER: *I think there's the presumption that they must represent a male chauvinistic, human-rights abusive structure. So there is a pre-judging of them really. They'd be quite surprised to hear what I heard, that many chiefs were really, in their own way, trying to grapple with gender-awareness and human rights and maybe haven't taken on board everything, but were well aware of what the debate was about and either reluctantly, or even sometimes with some degree of conviction, were trying to change. But no credit is given to that by most international organizations who've heard of the abuses and have heard of the trials by ordeal that are still going on in Sierra Leone and tend to tar everybody with the same brush. So I think that's so.*

*That sort of judgment and prejudice I find a bit bizarre. On the one hand they look at the state police and see every abuse going on that is typical of that culture, and don't see that as irredeemable; they see that as worthy of attention and at least within the bounds of reform. But when they see similar abuses in non-state*



---

*policing – customary or whatever, that is held over their heads as something to criminalize them and marginalize them. I think that's a double standard. As I see it, you don't actually have very much difference in terms of conduct between state and non-state policing because they're all coming from the same culture, emerging from the same sort of background, so tend to think similarly.*

*What we're about is bringing change in the culture and I don't see it is any different, whether it is non-state or state policing, they're both pretty intractable issues for us.*

PEAKE: You mentioned Liberia as being almost a case of bad practice in terms of bad practice in terms of international organizations and their attitude towards these non-state entities. Is there any experience that you can think about in which there was better practice in which donors, international organizations worked effectively, worked hand-in-hand with non-state groupings?

BAKER: *I think sadly the answer is no. You see in Liberia there wasn't even any consultation with customary chiefs. At least there was some sort of degree of consultation in Sierra Leone. In Liberia there was also, as part of the SSR (Security Sector Reform) process, no consultation with commercial security either. So no, I think, the international community is into state building more than providing security and justice for the poor. I think they're into state building, so I can't think of any positive examples.*

PEAKE: I'm going to move on to talk about commercial security in a bit, but before I do I'd like to ask you a question about innovations on the part of communities, on the parts of groups of people, on the parts of NGOs and the parts of a country to introduce innovations in an informal or non-state system. For example, in Bangladesh, women in some communities felt they were unfairly treated by some of the local justice systems, so NGOs introduced their own versions of these groups. Did anything like that happen where you've seen and, if so, how were these innovations received?

BAKER: *I think the most significant innovation was in the Bo area, southern Sierra Leone, where a whole group of community-based organizations who had adopted the values of restorative justice, came together under the—I can't remember the name now of the umbrella organization, but essentially, they were reacting not just to the ineffectiveness or the absence of state policing, they were also reacting to what they didn't like about customary policing and their view that many of their fines were excessive and that people, especially males were punished by having to do virtually indentured labor on the chief's farms.*

*So their organization spread quite rapidly around the southern parts of Sierra Leone by setting up a little committee in each village that alerts the organization to any potential conflicts and disputes, whether it is over land or over inheritance or similar things. Then instantly they send in trained counselors and people aware of restorative justice approaches and try to nip it in the bud. So, on the one hand, it provides policing where there is no state police; on the other hand it tries to avoid the excesses of the customary chiefs in that area and is offered as a free service. It has become very popular.*

*Now, how is that received? Well, the local administration, I don't know about the actual national administration, but local administration has given it its blessing, approved it. But what's fascinating, of course, is the rather disenchanted response of the chiefs who see that they're losing a source of income from the fines, etc. and*

---

*really aren't so impressed with this rival, non-state policing group. So there is tension there. I think the pressure is on from the chiefs at the national level to get the state to somehow rein in this CBO (Community-Based Organization) initiative.*

PEAKE: Talking a little bit more about that initiative? How would one go about seeking remedy for problems with the community? Can you just talk me through the process about how one would work with this group of restorative justice agencies based out of Bo?

BAKER: *How one would work? You mean as donors or as an individual?*

PEAKE: As an individual. If I, for example, had a problem in that vicinity, how would I go to get resolution?

BAKER: *Traditionally, of course, in Sierra Leone as, virtually everywhere else in Africa, any dispute over the land, any disputes over divorce, any disputes over adultery, any disputes over debts, any disputes over accommodation, they would go not to the police but to the chief or the elders. In this situation now around the Bo area, Bo being quite a sizable town, and the villages around it, they would now be available in that village, or a nearby village, a recognized member of this restorative justice group. So you would go there and they would call in maybe a couple of trained people to run a court very similar to the traditional customary court, in other words based on hearing everyone's side of the argument and seeking not so much to determine who is the guilty party and who is the victim, but seeking a resolution. I mean, that's what customary chiefs do. Of course, in that particular area, customary chiefs have a bad reputation for when they've done that, expecting a large payment.*

*So in one sense it's conducted just as the chiefs would, but there is not the contribution to the chief. This is their claim, I didn't actually see it in practice, but I did speak to their leaders. Hopefully there's not the same male chauvinistic bias that is so often, allegedly, part of the reaching a decision in a customary court over inheritance, divorce, etc., or the presumption that the male is right and the female is wrong, etc. So they try to redress that. How effectively, I can only say from hearsay, not from personal observation.*

PEAKE: Thank you. I'd like to conclude this part of the interview, we're talking about non-state customary informal forms of policing provision, by asking you to give your do's and don'ts for international organizations that will be working in countries, in context, in which the non-state police agencies in all their multifarious forms are quite strong and may, according to some statistics, even outweigh the formal state police itself. What would be your advice? What should you do and, at the same time, what should you not do?

BAKER: *I can't think in Africa there would be a country where everyday policing isn't largely provided, in the majority of the cases, by non-state policing. Given that's so, I think it would be worth alerting international organizations to that fact because if we come from the West, we see commercial security and we recognize that's large, but we don't actually think too much about anything else, or perhaps not even here in the West. So just to alert people: 'listen, there is a quite different social context that you're going into. You're going into a country where the police are not only not respected, but the police are not even present over large tracts of the land'. But we haven't got anarchy, we have got, rightly or*

---

wrongly, a lot of other people who are filling the vacuum, so to make them aware of that.

*Which will then, I would have thought, lead all international organizations, as they move into a territory to seek to do, however minimally, some sort of audit just to make themselves aware of who is on the ground. It seems an obvious thing to say, but somehow or other it has got overlooked. Don't forget that in Africa, the majority of the population is still rural. I know that cities are growing rapidly, faster in Africa than any other continent at the moment. Maybe in many countries they're reaching the 50% point. But, even there, 50% of the population will not be in your towns and probably 70% of the population elsewhere will not be in the towns. So you've got to have a strategy for policing which, whatever else, has to involve rural policing. You must have a strategy for it.*

*So I'd say an audit of who is on the ground. It's fairly easy to work out who can be criminalized - you can't strike deals with these. Then I'd encourage people not to use double standards. This audit is going to throw up a lot of groups that fall into a gray area. There will be youth groups that are really quite effective at chasing drug dealers out of town, quite effective at protecting people from thefts at night, and quite effective at finding stolen property, but might be regarded as less than desirable in terms of the way that when they catch a thief or they beat him up. The donors might not like that.*

*But I would say before you classify that policing in the criminalized group, let's remember to use the same standards of judgment. The police that you've come to reform and to work with are human rights abusers. They beat suspects up because they've not got the advantages we have of forensic science. They probably haven't got a forensic science laboratory that is working or it would be very inadequately equipped. How on earth do they get to find out who committed and who didn't commit a crime? Well, whether we like it or not, most police resort to violence and brutality, the same as the youth group do capture someone, beat him up and say, "Who's giving you this drug, this illicit liquor, this whatever?"*

*So here are these groups, many of them civic-minded, conscientious, doing their bit as they see it, to serve the community for nothing. These are volunteers, staying up all night, doing patrols. I would say, because such civic mindedness is so rare in the West, if I could find twenty young men, in their twenties, who were willing to give up time and energy to protect their community from crime, I'd feel I could do business with them and I can't see why the international community can't even consider doing business with them.*

*I suppose if you're going to sell this one to the police, you've got to sell it along the lines of, 'this can assist you, this can make you appear better in your crime statistics of crimes solved. Partnerships are not necessarily them doing your work, but these can be people who can facilitate the work that you want to do', maybe, to give them a role in oversight, without actually having to micromanage them.*

*I think with the right sort of approach this could be sold to the police as do-able. In the local police station, this actually happens. So we're not actually talking about something totally off the wall, this happens informally. So we're not making a huge leap to say let's encourage this. But if you don't persuade the police, then it's going to be a hazardous route.*

PEAKE: What you're saying is do not ignore the non-state sector.

BAKER: Yes.

PEAKE: I'd like to move on to talk about one of the other non-state forms of policing that you've mentioned in your remarks so far, but I'd like to explore a little bit further and that is commercial security providers. I wonder if you could talk a little bit about a) what you mean by commercial security advisors and b) what forms of policing do they provide, c) what is the extent of their policing vis-à-vis the state police, based upon your experience.

BAKER: *What do I mean by them. I mean those organized security groups that run businesses for profit. They were not very common before the '90s, now they frequently, as in Liberia, not quite in Sierra Leone, outnumber the state police force in terms of number of guards active on patrol. So they're serious players. From the government and donors point of view they're very serious because they actually are the ones who are protecting the chief economic assets of the country: the mines and the main businesses, the wealthy people, the hotels for the tourist industry or whatever. Even donors and donor organizations, even the United Nations!. These are all protected by commercial security guards. By and large we are talking about guarding. That's their main work. They're guarding the chief economic assets, the banks, even government ministries.*

*So given their size and given their economic significance, I'm really at a loss to understand why in security sector reform they're not even on the radar. So they're important players. You don't find them much in the countryside apart from the mining areas.*

*So you asked me who they were, what they did, what was your other question?*

PEAKE: The extent of their policing remit, vis-à-vis the official police.

BAKER: *The main thing is guarding, but what is very strange is the sort of poor or lack of relationship that they have with the police. In Uganda I came across a few examples where the police worked with them, or some of the multinational security companies on joint operations when they got a tip off that there was going to be a bank raid, etc. Some of the larger organizations in Rwanda and Sierra Leone, the police would work with, often because they were run in practice by managers who had been ex-coppers and who they knew fairly well or because of them being a multinational firm they were given some sort of respect.*

*But for the most part, the managers of commercial companies claim that they give information to the police but it's never reciprocated. They claim that the police have virtually no contact with them at all. They, and their own guards that I've spoken to, claim that they are despised by the police, frequently seen as rivals by the police. Probably the average policeman sees them as threatening because they're frequently better equipped, and trained at least to the same standards as the police, often by ex-police trainers of course.*

*Did I say better equipped? Certainly better serviced in terms of CS gas, or they've got extending truncheons or they've got vehicles that take them around. I think a lot of policemen find them genuine commercial rivals encroaching on their patch. So the average policeman isn't really very enamored with them at all. So the senior commanders talk the talk about collaboration, but the reality is, when you go to the managers of the commercial security companies, unless they've*

---

*got very close personal contacts with the police, their word is, 'police don't go near us', which seems a shame and something crying out to be done.*

PEAKE: In the statement before last you said two things that were almost contradictory in terms which were one that the reach, the large reach of private security and policing and the fact that most international organizations use private security to guard their buildings, guard their homes, guard their offices. Then you went on to say that in programming terms, international organizations, those who are working on police reform, tend to bypass, ignore, maybe not consider private security and the policing that they provide. I wonder if you can expand on that statement a little better, on that potential contradiction that you identified, perhaps with some specific examples from where you've seen this disjuncture.

PEAKE: I've asked you a couple of questions and you've looked at me and thought about it and then said, unfortunately the answer to those questions is no. Are there any instances that come to mind about where there has been effective, efficacious cooperation between these private security groupings and international organizations and/or national police services? You mentioned Firestone in Liberia, almost born out of necessity in a way. But are there other examples that spring to mind?

BAKER: No.

PEAKE: We were talking about customary and formal forms of policing, I asked you to list some do's and don'ts, vis-à-vis international donors and aspirant reformers. Are there any do's and don'ts that you would suggest regarding international organizations, donors, those working on police reform and how they should work with private security.

BAKER: *Yes, they should. They should tap into their resources. I think the South African police are a lot better at doing that than the rest of Africa, so yes. I think it wouldn't be very hard to set up a regular exchange of intelligence. But if it's not two way, then it's quickly going to dry up—. Now, why should a commercial security firm be constantly sending information to the police to tell them of intended bank raids, etc., if the police haven't got the courtesy, or whatever, to send something back. Given that they're both focused, by and large, on urban centers, both focused on the economic resources of the country. It is not beyond the wit of man to be able to cooperate at the operational level, to do joint operations and for senior managers to meet together and discuss the problems that they're coming up against. Given that both have limited resources, sharing out the work has a lot of scope.*

*Also, it's time that the African states got their act together in terms of some sort of legislation covering these commercial security companies. Apart from South Africa, there's hardly any country in Africa that has any significant, specific legislation for commercial security. It all comes under general laws affecting contracts and affecting businesses, but not private security as such.*

*Given that in a lot of countries they're armed, given that they have such economic significance, they really ought to come under some sort of legislation. I know there's an issue in Africa where you can pass laws but it's not necessarily enforced but it seems to me to be important. Clearly criminal elements do penetrate commercial security, as they do in the police of course. Clearly a lot of*

---

*ex-combatants have gone into private security as an obvious way of using the only skill they've got for employment. Well, this raises all sorts of problems. It's not a coincidence often that when there are serious burglaries, it is often found that a guard has been bribed or tipped off to be away at that particular time. They have links with the people that are perpetuating the crimes. So I would say it's pretty important to get some legislation on these companies.*

*Although there's normally some sort of vague requirement for the police to inspect commercial security premises, to inspect their finances, etc., the inspection is half hearted at best*

PEAKE: I'd like to begin to sort of try to wrap up this conversation. What I'd like to do is ask you two more questions if you're willing and then allow you the opportunity, before the recording ends, to maybe alight on issues that you felt that the interview hasn't touched upon. The first question I would like to ask you is really about lessons learning and transference of lessons.

With respect to the countries in which you've worked on policing, is there anything about the context or history that means that most lessons learned elsewhere are inapplicable in these settings? I mean, is there anything that would limit the ability of borrowing innovations or lessons from one country in which you have worked to another? I mean, you've talked about some of the innovations that you've seen and some of the bad practices you've seen. Is there anything that prevents lessons learning, prevents transference of good practice or not so bad practice in country X to another country?

BAKER: *I'm probably not very qualified to talk upon that, but I did speak to the Commonwealth Safety and Security Programme managers in Sierra Leone, this was the commonwealth policing group that was sent in there to train and reform the policing group. One, there's a structural problem there that is not unique. There was also there, at the same time, a United Nations group and the two groups didn't always see eye-to-eye. They often stepped on one another's toes. So I think there was an issue there.*

*But the lesson learning?. The people on that commonwealth team were individually very experienced and able people and I respected them as such. But no time really was given to reflection. No time was ever given to writing up those reflections or any conclusions because they're working on contracts. I got to know someone quite well there in Freetown, who helped me a lot, but the minute that contract ended, he whisked off straightaway to some other country. So there was no space in the contract to do anything other than to advise the police. There was no space for writing at all. Apart from me tapping him up to try and get some of the lessons he learned and write them down myself, he never had, and I could see never would, nor would any of his colleagues, written it down.*

*So that seemed to me to be problematic. Now, I don't know much about how these contracts are written, but one would hope that a contract would give space for these folks to reflect and record. But the other side of the coin is that most of these African situations I've been into are extremely wary of the experts who turn up saying, "We've learned lessons from Bosnia so we'll pass them on to you." Because rightly or wrongly, most of the countries I've been to in Africa feel that their situation is very, very different. I really don't feel too qualified to speak any more about that.*

---

PEAKE: Okay, the final question is a very general one, but I think could elicit some interesting answers. The question is, if you had a chance to write a handbook for people who have to build civilian police units in challenging environments what kind of topics would you consider important to include?

BAKER: *Say that again?*

PEAKE: If you were tasked with writing a handbook which is for individuals who were going to go off to foreign lands to work on police reform, help build, establish, reform, police. What topics, what bits of advice do you think would be most useful to impart? What bits of advice do you think would be most useful to put in this handbook?

BAKER: *The most useful advice is something you probably can't put in a handbook. It must be the issue of modesty, that however senior police commander you are in your own country, or however much consultancy you have done, the degree to which that is transferable to an African culture has to be a lot, lot less than you actually think. But I don't think reading those words anyone ever believes that. Yes, they say, "I'm modest" and "I'm going to listen to people." We always say that, but in practice we hit the road running, we have an agenda to do within a short time span, to transform an institution which is as tough as they come for changing a work culture. So I don't know how you get across modesty. How do you convince consultants and senior policemen from the West that actually what they're about is social engineering and that the history of the world shows that social engineering has been a doomed project. If Lenin hasn't proved anything, he's proved social engineering is surely difficult.*

*So I'm probably trying to convince people that they are on a mission impossible. The only way perhaps that could translate into something helpful would be to lower your sights, but then that's more about the mission parameters than for the actual individuals that are caught up in these grandiose schemes of reforming the police, security for the poor etc. If only we could, but these are impossible tasks.*

*So that's one thing that won't get into your handbook because it can't be taught, it has to be felt. What else? Well we'd say all the usual things of consultation and listening, but has anyone got any time, is anyone really going to listen to a customary chief? Here's this man who has never had education from primary school, is he going to be able to tell me anything, this professional person, about how to conduct policing. What else might there be?*

*I wonder if on the team shouldn't be an anthropologist and sociologists. I'm surprised, they tend to be policing consultants who I think, by definition are very limited because exporting police, or policing, is a very problematic thing. So maybe these missions could take on board some anthropologists and sociologists, the ethnography wouldn't do them any harm. I suppose I'd want them not to jump to pre-conclusions; that they will go into a country where people would have already been labeled vigilantes. We all know what vigilantes are, the scum of the earth to be locked up and certainly not people we want to deal with. Well, you need to look again at vigilantes and not be put off by names and titles like that.*

*Just like one thinks that traditional structures must be old-fashioned, irrelevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and full of abuse; so we think vigilantes must be a gang of youngsters with machetes in their hands. Well these are misconceptions it is worth getting out of your head now.*

---

*Then I suppose I'd say, list ten aims that you have got for this mission, cross out nine of them and go for one. I can't think of anything else to say.*

PEAKE: Thank you very much. Before I conclude, is there anything that you feel that is important to record about your experience of working on police reform that hasn't come up in the course of this interview?

BAKER: *Yes, I think there's a crucial, crucial matter about the model that Uganda in part and Rwanda are following that needs to be taken into account. People tend to assume that there's no alternative to this reform the police model. You need to look again at Rwanda because they mercifully didn't listen much to the donors for very good reasons, because of their experience in the genocide. So coming from their socialist, popular justice roots, there may be more to it than some people think, but at least it gave them the humility at the beginning of the new regime to say, "We have not got the resources to establish a nationwide state police force to provide the security we want for our people and our people are entitled to." And they don't think they will ever have resources, so this is the only country in Africa I know that has actually got the honesty with its population to say we can't do it. We cannot provide what we want to provide for you.*

*So their scheme, and you might not like all the details of it is worth considering.*

PEAKE: It would be good to get as much detail as possible.

BAKER: *The overall structure of it, the model of it, is interesting. Uganda is similar, for obvious reasons, the link between Museveni and Kagame. The model is that we're not going to look to the state to provide and we're disillusioned with traditional leaders. It was traditional leaders who committed and led the genocide. It's the traditional leaders who are hand-in-glove with Obote and Amin and it was state appointees that never did any good for their local communities.*

*So there are two things there. It's not the customary route, it's not the state police route. So what is it? In those cases, but especially Rwandan case, there's a looking to the local community to provide everyday policing. Because the whole country and the whole regime, including the police force from the very beginning respected, deeply respected local communities to be able to look after their own security. Respect therefore translates into 'we can delegate and trust'.*

*So Rwandan police trust the local communities to run the show and have no problem at all with competition. They're absolutely delighted that they can focus on serious crime and on major urban issues and on the main economic sites and sites of national security and know that justice and crime prevention and crime investigation will be carried out by local bodies. Now who are these local bodies?*

*Well in cultural terms they imitate the old customary bodies, but we're talking about elected leaders who are enlisting local people, all on a voluntary basis. I'm not quite sure where you'd want to put them in terms of non-state policing. They're actually below the official level of local administration and local government. But they're linked into hierarchical system such that as you go up the hierarchy, eventually you smoothly and automatically move into the official local government structures. So you might say they're local government at the voluntary level; you might say they're non-state but with links to the state. I think the terminology is not important.*



*What's exciting to me is, you go to any village, any township in Rwanda and most people feel very secure, feel that there is minimal crime. I think this does tend to overlook sexual violence, but by and large people feel there is a lot of protection, a lot of security and that things are handled, if there are problems, fairly and justly in these local community courts. Everyone is extremely happy. The police are just summoned and brought in occasionally otherwise they are delighted to leave the folks to it. I regard that as—for a country that has no resources, no capacity—as an obvious solution. It proves, despite the critics, that it can work. The issue is not about training people and giving them education, it's about trusting people and assisting them, and with very minimal cost. These folks haven't got resources handy, it's all done voluntarily.*

*You're tapping into voluntarism which I know may run out in a couple of generations, post conflict. But anyway, they're tapping into that. Therefore it's not just solving crime issues, but is actually providing a sort of social cohesion and developing civic mindedness, all of which are qualities you want in a post conflict situation anyway. So you're gaining all around, aren't you? Because they're elected, these leaders, if you're poor or corrupt or useless at your work in terms of providing justice and security, you're out, simple as that.*

*Now the critics will come along and say, well in practice the state does try and tweak the system and push it. Yes, politics messes up everything, like it does in the UK, but I don't think that gives you grounds to dismiss the model. So I think that's the most exciting model I've seen in Africa. It's a workable, do-able model. I don't suppose it would ever have been a model that the donors introduced. So fascinatingly, in the one country, one of the poorest countries in Africa that turned its back on the donors, it, I think, has found a system, a workable justice and crime prevention system that is infinitely above all of the vast state supported work of the United Nations and other donors. It almost makes me think, perhaps I shouldn't be recorded as saying this: please leave these people alone. That's probably extreme. I'm inclined towards that direction. I'm thinking, goodness, Rwanda has done it and maybe others would do it. Mind you, I have to still say, in Rwanda there's something that is significantly different. There's the political will. There's a determination at the highest levels, that the local communities will be trusted with security and policing. That's translated into the police being utterly committed to it as well and maybe, now I think about it, maybe to achieve that in most African countries would take a type of genocide.*

PEAKE: Mr. Baker, thank you very much for your time.