

Unexpected Protest/Civil Unrest

Facilitator:

You are working as a field supervisor on the afternoon shift (1600hrs-0000hrs) with the normal deployment of officers in your area. This consists of one (1) Watch Commander, four (4) field supervisors and twenty (20) patrol officers.

Your dispatch center begins receiving several phone calls from the downtown business area concerning a group of approximately 50-100 people gathering at one of the largest downtown intersections in your community. The people are waiving signs, blocking traffic and yelling about an officer-involved shooting that occurred in another jurisdiction. The field supervisor assigned to that section of the downtown area acknowledges the radio broadcast and requests all of the available officers assigned to that area to respond. The responding supervisor is new and previously spent the last five years as a patrol officer in an administrative assignment before their promotion three weeks ago. Dispatch informs the supervisor they only have two officers assigned to that area that can respond, but that they expect two other officers to be clear from another call soon. The supervisor states, "We will just handle it with what we have."

The first officer arrives on scene and reports the group has swelled to at least 200-300 people. The group has now gathered in the middle of the intersection, blocking the travel lanes in all directions. The officer then reports the group has begun to march out of the intersection travelling north on Main Street. There is a local highway approximately ¼ of a mile away in that direction. The officer asks the supervisor, "Should I stop them before they can enter the highway?" The new supervisor comes on the radio and advises the single officer to stop the 200-300 protesters.

As the more experienced FLS on duty, what actions might you consider?

(Facilitator Note: The point of the final sentence is to teach supervisors they may occasionally need to intervene, or "step on the toes of," other supervisors. The patrol officer in this scenario may believe the agency expects him/her to stop that group or else they would not have asked the question. However, veteran officers and supervisors know it is very unlikely one officer can safely stop 200-300 protesters.

The expectation here is for you, the experienced FLS, to intervene for the safety of everyone and advise the officer not to try to stop all those protesters alone. Then assign the next available unit to provide a traffic assistance in case the protesters attempt to access the highway. The priority at this point is to make sure they are not injured or cause injury to others. After securing the highway, the FLSs need to refer to their agency policies and procedures on responding to protests and civil unrest.

Lastly, it is important for newer FLSs to understand they are learning a new job and will make mistakes. You can always call the new supervisor on the phone or ask to meet with them privately to explain your actions if necessary. In the end, it is about getting the call right, not who made the right call.)

The FLS who took charge should:

1. *Call for as many units as possible while still keeping enough to service the rest of the city.*

2. *If possible, have a plain-clothes or unmarked unit monitor the protesters. This can allow the uniformed and marked units to remain at a distance and not incite the group.*
3. *Stage uniformed officers together in an area that is removed from the protest and prepare them to respond as a unit.*
4. *Go to the staging area and conduct a quick briefing and safety check for proper gear with the officers.*
5. *Establish a location for a command post if the protest becomes extended in duration.*
6. *Stage EMS and medical aid assets.*
7. *If available to your agency, request additional resources such as Air support/ Drone support and outside agency support. If called, ensure the outside agencies are provided the staging location and specific directions on your agency's expectations.*
8. *Contact Intelligence/Detective units to monitor social media to determine the direction of the protest – what are they planning on doing and if there are any counter protests moving in.*
9. *Follow local rules for protests/civil unrest.*
10. *If the protesters remain peaceful, they should be allowed to walk in the street. The police should try to protect the protesters from traffic hazards and other issues.*
11. *Stage marked patrol units in a position to create a traffic-break on both sides of the nearby local highway. If the protesters appear intent on blocking it, it will be safer to roll the traffic to a stop and let them block the road temporarily until they leave or can be safely removed by law enforcement. Local laws and protocols will dictate the response to this situation.*
12. *If the protesters start to riot, the police should be ready to step in. The police should stop looting, rioting, burning, etc., but should allow peaceful protest.*

Set up a place for the news media and notify your agency Public Information Officer (PIO).