



Like most of the country's more than 18,000 local law enforcement agencies, the Providence Police Department went to war against terror after Sept. 11, embracing a fundamental shift in its national security role.

Now, police officials here express doubts about whether the imperative to protect domestic security has blinded federal authorities to other priorities. The department is battling homicides, robberies and gang shootings that the police in a number of cities say are as serious a threat as terrorism.

The Providence police chief, Col. Dean M. Esserman, said the federal government seemed unable to balance antiterror efforts and crime fighting.

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