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How Commissioner Kelly Reads His Way To Vigilance on Crime

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Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly starts his morning by reading through the crime reports from the last 24 hours, which are delivered to his apartment at 6 a.m. Then come the newspapers.

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After he arrives at his 14th-floor office at One Police Plaza — where he sits behind the same oak desk that Theodore Roosevelt used as police commissioner in 1895 — Mr. Kelly spends part of his day reading intelligence memorandums, paging through more crime reports, and scrutinizing the CompStat numbers.

But by evening, the commissioner turns his attention to more ruminative reading material: books.

Lately, he has been making his way through two works of nonfiction, "Future Jihad: Terrorist Strategies Against America" by Walid Phares and "State of Denial" by Bob Woodward.

Mr. Kelly said he reads between one and a half and three books a month. Mostly he only has time to read them at home, but he also listens to audio books on his iPod at the gym in the morning. It's not unusual for him to listen to the same book he is reading in print, he said. He likes to read the Economist for its international breadth, he said, as well as select articles in Time, Newsweek, and the New Yorker.

"Whoever sits in this seat needs much more of a global view of what's going on," Mr. Kelly said in an interview yesterday. "You need texture, a context to what's going on."

A look at the books the commissioner has read in the last several months show that terrorism and the Iraq war are foremost in his mind. From Lawrence Wright's narrative investigation of the attacks of September 11, 2001, "The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11," to Thomas Ricks's "Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq," Mr. Kelly said he seeks out books that will give him the information he needs to run a police department that can prevent terrorist attacks.

"I'm not reading, for the most part, crime books," he said. "I'm reading books that are broader in scope."

Mr. Kelly said "Future Jihad" — which tells the history of radical Islamist movements from the seventh century and advocates ways for America to win the ideological war against radical Islam — helps him think of terrorism as something that has occurred for centuries, not just pre- and post-September 11.

At the NYPD, "we have to think in a day-by-day basis to protect the city," he said. "You look at books like this and it says these people are in a perpetual state of war. The fact that nothing has happened in the short term shouldn't necessarily be taken as a victory. It's food for thought."

One book in particular, "Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror" by Rohan Gunaratna, has become a kind of required reading for the police department's top officials. Mr. Kelly had the department buy 400 copies to hand out. Mr. Gunaratna also completed a study of the department's counterterrorism strategies.

Many of the authors whom Mr. Kelly reads also are invited to the department to give lectures.

The commissioner does occasionally break away from terrorism-related books. He recently read "Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking" by Malcolm Gladwell, and "The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century" by Thomas Friedman.

A co-author of "NYPD: A City and Its Police," Thomas Reppetto, said Mr. Kelly's after-hours reading brings to mind another police commissioner, Arthur Woods, who was a Harvard graduate, reporter for The New York Sun, and well-known reader of books by the time he took the top city police job in 1914.

Woods went on to write "Crime Prevention" in 1918, "Policeman and Public" in 1919, and "Dangerous Drugs" in 1931. He also was known for sending detectives beyond the city's boundaries and running some of the police department's first counterterrorism operations — all of which have echoes in Mr. Kelly's administration.

After leaving the police department in 1918, Woods took positions in the federal government, including assistant to the secretary of war. Mr. Reppetto said Mr. Kelly's future trajectory might be similar.

"Secretary of homeland security," Mr. Reppetto mused. "He'd be a natural for that job."

What's On Police Commissioner Kelly's Bedside Table

CURRENTLY READING

- 'State of Denial,' by Bob Woodward
- 'Future Jihad: Terrorist Strategies Against America,' by Walid Phares

RECENTLY READ

- 'The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11,' by Lawrence Wright
- 'The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the 21st Century,' by Thomas Friedman
- 'Cobra 2: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq,' by Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor
- 'Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq,' by Thomas Ricks
- 'Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking,' by Malcolm Gladwell
- 'The One Percent Doctrine,' by Ron Suskind

RECOMMENDED READING FOR FOP NYPD OFFICIALS

- 'Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror,' by Rohan Gunaratna

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