



RESPONDING TO MODERN TERRORISM THREATS

Key Issues in Crisis Response

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CRISIS  **AVERT**

Prepare | Prevent | Prevail

INTRODUCTION

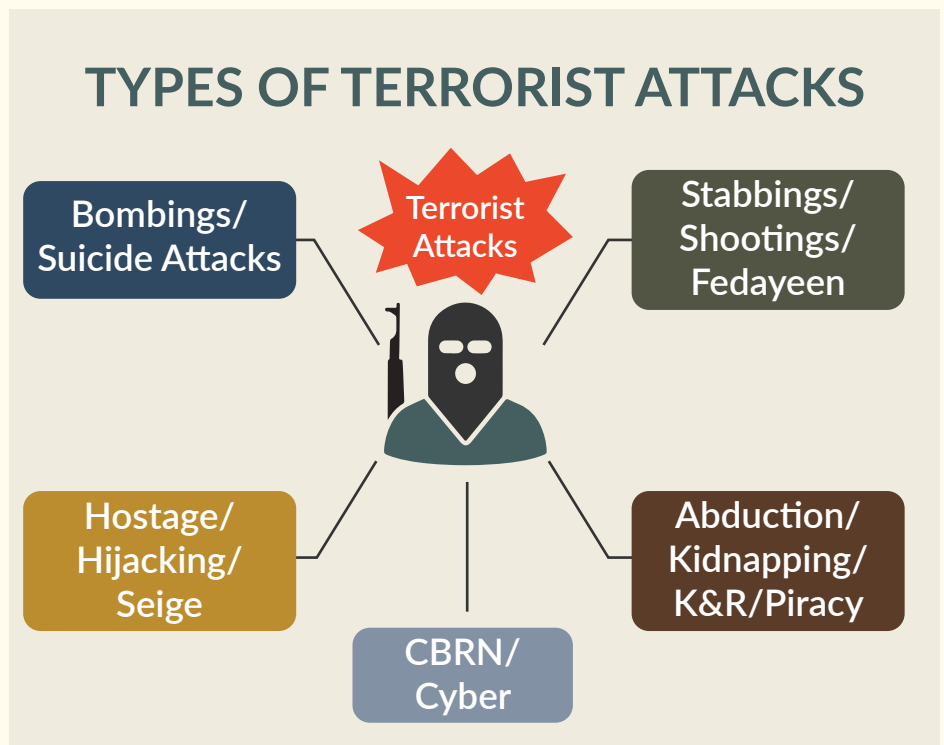
The ever evolving face of terrorism makes it very difficult for law enforcement to keep up with the rapidly changing threats posed by terrorist groups: from the hijacking and hostage-taking incidents of the 1970s – 1990s to the multiple and frequent bombings, shootings and Fedayeen style attacks since 2001. As the graphic below shows, numerous tactics have been used by terrorist groups over the years; making it all the more important that authorities are ready and able to respond to an extremely wide range of incident and scenarios.

With the emergence of Islamic State (IS) in the last few years and the increase of so-called “lone-wolf” individuals or groups supporting IS, the threat has increased significantly and it has become harder for law enforcement to anticipate and interdict their activities, particularly as many of the perpetrators are now home-grown radicalized IS sympathizers.

The Global Terrorism Index Report for 2015 prepared by the Institute of Economics and Peace notes that “lone-wolf” terrorist attacks account for 70% of all terrorist-related deaths in the west since 2006. The prevalence of attacks on civilian targets has also made it very difficult for authorities to respond without unduly affecting the rights and freedoms of the general population.

It has therefore become more important than ever for authorities to have an effective and comprehensive approach to maintaining public safety and security. By adopting the “2-Ps and 2-Rs” (Prevention, Preparation, Response and Recovery), authorities can develop and implement a systematic approach that will help them better prepare and respond to the escalating terrorist threat around the world.

This article will therefore consider how the authorities can better enhance their prevention, preparation, response and recovery measures needed both from a public as well as private sector perspective.



PREVENTION

Legal Frameworks

It is essential that Governments and organizations have the necessary legal instruments in place to effectively prevent and respond to a terrorist incident. Without these, it will be very difficult for law enforcement to proactively intercept and interdict as well as investigate terrorist acts and their perpetrators. Some key questions to consider include:



- *Does law enforcement have the necessary legal powers to undertake their duties?*
- *Are there legal provisions for the mobilization of the military if required?*
- *Are there international declarations related to terrorism that need to be adhered to?*
- *Can the terrorist's financial assets be frozen, investigated and seized?*

PASSPORT

Border Controls

One of the key opportunities for preventing and interdicting possible terrorist activities is to have effective screening or monitoring at borders. Without such checking and screening processes, it is very difficult for authorities to flag any potential Person(s)-of-Interest (POI) or to monitor their movements. Whilst it may not be possible to interdict them at this stage if no crimes have yet been committed, it is at least then possible to track their subsequent movements if they are later found to be involved in any criminal or terrorist activities. It also makes it

easier to determine whether they may have left the country or not. More effective border controls would also make it more meaningful when intelligence is shared between countries as there is then greater justification for POIs being given a greater level of scrutiny when passing through border checkpoints.

Threat Assessments

Whilst many countries now issue terrorism threat levels, not enough is being done to conduct thorough threat assessments of vulnerable locations, events or persons. It is essential that all areas of vulnerability are carefully assessed to determine if they provide opportunities for terrorist acts that might be prevented with a few security enhancements. Of course, with so many soft targets available, the threat assessments must adopt a careful balance between enhanced security and public convenience.





Target Hardening

Locations or persons identified as particularly vulnerable during the threat assessments should be carefully addressed. A high profile dignitary or business person, for example, may wish to consider arranging for enhanced personal security. High profile, high importance or symbolic targets, such as critical infrastructures, airports, transport facilities, high public traffic areas, etc, need to have enhanced CCTV coverage, security, and interface with response services.

High Visibility

Target hardening can also be achieved through an increased law enforcement or security presence, which can often act as an effective deterrent. However, bear in mind that they themselves may also become the targets of specific or secondary attacks, as was recently seen in Turkey.



PREPAREDNESS

Strategic Intelligence

When it comes to being properly prepared, it's important that law enforcement authorities are closely monitoring the current and emerging trends so that they can take the necessary precautionary steps well in advance. Analysis of trends and terrorist groups, however, must be forward thinking as history has shown that the terrorists are often a few steps ahead of the authorities as they are not constrained by legal issues or political considerations. All too often, terrorist groups and their capabilities have been gravely underestimated with disastrous consequences.





Awareness

When strategic intelligence does suggest there may well be a potential threat, it is essential that law enforcement, as well as the general public, are made properly aware of this threat and what they can do to heighten their sense of alertness throughout the community. Cross-sector briefings can be very effective to ensure that everyone is on the same page and aware of each other's roles, responsibilities and capabilities.

Training, Exercises and Drills

Responding to a terrorist incident or aftermath is a very difficult and complicated matter and it is essential that those required to respond, particularly the decision-makers, fully understand what is required of them and how to maximize the effectiveness of the response. This can only be done through regular and thorough training and exercises which, whilst time consuming and disruptive, ensures that everyone is better prepared to respond to any eventuality that might arise.



Community Engagement

Whilst training and exercises focus primarily on the response by the authorities, it is still important that the public are kept up to date with the threat (if any) so that they can take their own precautionary measures and that they are confident that the authorities are able to respond effectively to an incident and, more importantly, protect the public at large. The public can, and should, from time to time be involved in training exercises and can even assist the authorities to stress-test their plans with evacuation simulations, etc, that also involve the public.



Threat Levels

Currently, many countries are issuing threat levels for the information of the public but as some of these threat levels can remain in force for over a year, their value soon begins to fade as complacency sets in. Without specific intelligence to support a heightened threat level (anything at "Severe" or above), these should be used very sparingly and only for short durations. More effective would be a Readiness Level Alert that would put authorities on a heightened readiness level to ensure a prompt and efficient response whenever the need arises.



RESPONSE

Response Strategy

The first step in having an effective response strategy is to have in place all the necessary prevention and preparatory measures and resources required to respond quickly, efficiently and professionally. Some of these key elements will be discussed in greater detail below.

Operational Priorities



It is important to have a clear understanding and agreement on the key operational priorities throughout the response. First and foremost, of course, should be the saving of life, whether it's during the course of an ongoing hostage incident or the aftermath of a bombing or shooting incident. Secondly, it is also essential that the wider public are also kept safe either from the incident itself or from further incidents that might take place. Thirdly, the authorities should be looking to bring the perpetrators and their accomplices to justice in order to preempt further incidents taking place.

Command & Control

Any response to a terrorist incident requires a well tested and robust command and control mechanism. Terrorist incidents, by their nature, will be extremely complicated incidents to deal with, particularly if there are multiple incidents, significant casualties or massive disruption to routine activities. Without an effective and comprehensive command and control capability, the authorities will not be able to quickly address the many issues that they will need to deal with and manage.



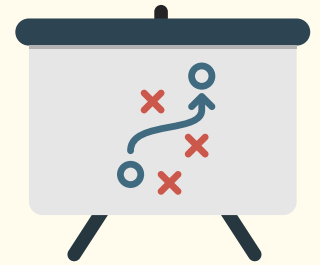


Tactical Intelligence

Tactical intelligence will also be key if tactical teams are deployed. They will want to know as much as possible about the threat posed, the environment in which they are working and the capabilities of the terrorist(s) involved. Whilst most tactical teams train to an extremely high level for these sort of events, they will always want to know as much as possible in order to increase their chances of success.

Tactical Response

A tactical response should always be ready and available but should also be used with extreme caution. As was seen in the recent Lindt Café Siege in Sydney, even extremely well trained tactical operators may not be able to secure the safe release of all the hostages and tactical failures can often lead to much soul searching and subsequent censure if it later transpires that more could have been done to ensure the safety of the hostages involved.



Negotiation Response

Which is why authorities must also continue to maintain a highly trained and capable negotiation response. A negotiated resolution to the incident is always preferable but even if that is not always possible, it helps to buy time for other options and solutions to be put in place.



Media Management

Any terrorist incident is naturally going to attract massive international media interest and one of the tasks of the crisis response is to carefully manage the media to ensure that they do not interfere with the running of the event or put at risk those involved by compromising the response measures. Frequent press briefings and updates will go a long way towards ensuring media cooperation and assistance, particularly as the media may well be able to obtain key information that might be relevant to the authorities during the response or during the later investigations.



Public Management

During a terrorist incident, the public are of course going to be extremely concerned and will want as much information as possible, particularly if they believe that their loved ones might be affected. The media may be able to help with this but it is important that the authorities reassure the public that they are properly dealing with the incident and provide advice on what the public can do to safeguard themselves. The assistance of the public should also be sought, as was the case following the Boston bombing, as they may be able to provide potentially vital information and intelligence to the responding authorities.



Social Media

Whilst the authorities can often develop a good working relationship with the media, this is not always the case with social media, which has to be carefully monitored so that quick follow-up actions can be taken to address any issues that might arise. In the recent hijacking of Egypt Air MS181, which later turned out not to be a terrorist incident, one of the so-called hostages actually took a selfie with the 'hijacker'.



Transnational Cooperation

One thing that has become very evident following the Paris and Brussels attacks, terrorists and terrorism are not confined by borders and authorities must continue to establish good working relations with their international counterparts in order to respond effectively and decisively. Transnational cooperation is essential if the authorities wish to work together against terrorist groups in order to interdict their activities.



Sustainability

Whilst many authorities do train and prepare for the possibility of a terrorist incident in their jurisdiction, exercises do not always test the full scale and complexity of such incidents and more effort needs to be put in to ensuring a higher level of capability and capacity building for a prolonged and complex incident. The terrorist attacks in Mumbai, for example, demonstrated the difficulty authorities will have in dealing with multiple incidents, in multiple locations, over an extended period, with determined and well armed terrorists.



RECOVERY

Investigations

Of course, once the incident has been dealt with, the authorities still need to pursue with the utmost rigour the investigation of the incident, the group involved and their support network. This is essential in order to bring the criminals involved to justice and also to interdict other groups from carrying out similar atrocities.



Emotional Issues



Responders, victims and the public at large are always deeply affected by such events and the need for emotional support should be a critical element in the recovery process to ensure that everyone can start to move forward. This may require the assistance of Medical Health Practitioners to provide necessary counselling and support to all those affected.

Business Continuity

Both the public and private sector will also need to put in place necessary business continuity measures in order to get everything back to normal as soon as possible. Following the Brussels attacks, for example, the primary airport was out of action for a number of months. Fortunately, the authorities had necessary contingency measures in place and were able to use an alternative airport. However, business losses can often be significant and it may be necessary for financial injections to help support those affected by the incident and to help bring about an earlier return to normalcy.



Peter R. Morgan is the Director of Crisis Avert Ltd and spent over 33 years in law enforcement. He was Commander of the Police Hostage Negotiation Unit for 12 years, responsible for responding to counter-terrorist incidents, public order negotiations, serious criminal and domestic crisis incidents as well as suicide and barricaded situations. He is the author of "Critical Issues in Crisis Negotiations", available on Amazon. If you would like more information, visit our website at:

www.CrisisAvert.com