

**By Eloy Nunez, Ernest G. Vendrell, and Scott Watson**

## **Terrorism's Impact on Crisis Management**

The events of September 11, 2001, had a profound impact on the way the nation perceived the threat posed by terrorist groups. Despite a series of highly publicized and well-coordinated attacks on United States' interests abroad during the 1990s, the public was largely unprepared for the potentially catastrophic violence posed by small groups of committed individuals. As security professionals it is easy to deride this lack of preparedness; however, it must be remembered that prior to September 11, 2001, the public's exposure to terrorism, while significantly troubling, did not come close to approaching the impact of the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and United Flight 93 attacks.

In the 1980s, terrorists' tactics generally included the hijacking of airliners and seizing of hostages to create uncertainty, promote fear, and engineer an environment of international drama on which to publicize their cause. By the 1990s, terrorist tactics changed. While kidnappings still occurred, bombings and other high casualty-producing attacks became more commonplace. The attacks on the US Embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, as well as the bombing of Khobar Towers in Saudi Arabia, the seaborne assault on the U.S.S. Cole in Yemen, the domestic acts of terrorism on the Alfred P. Murrah building in Oklahoma City, and the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993 are but a few examples.

Over time, terrorist attacks shifted from the deadly, yet limited, actions choreographed to obtain worldwide attention to catastrophic, casualty-dense attacks designed to shock the populace with high body counts while simultaneously destroying or damaging critical infrastructure (Jenkins 2006; MIPT Terrorism Knowledge base, 2007, <http://www.tkb.org/>; Kean et al., 2004, 9/11 Commission Report; Stern 1999).

Today we are seeing yet another shift in terrorism strategy; especially among Jihadist groups. As the global war on terror has progressed, Western governments have shared information, frozen assets and captured or eliminated numerous terrorist leaders. This coordinated campaign has degraded the capability of Jihadist terror organizations to conduct catastrophic attacks outside of their main spheres of influence. Jihadist organizations have adapted to this situation, by making extensive use of social media to encourage individual Western sympathizers to conduct small scale attacks in their own countries (MSA Worldview No. 25, 2014).

By encouraging "lone wolf" terrorists, the Jihadists are seeking to reduce the risk of failed operations in the United States and other Western countries. After all, a lone terrorist doesn't have to worry that co-conspirators will compromise his operation. This "leaderless resistance" comes with a cost as the terrorist forgoes attempts at spectacular operations in favor of smaller attacks that are more likely to succeed.

Some recent examples of lone wolf attacks include:

- October 20, 2014: A Canadian man with Jihadist sympathies uses his vehicle to run over two Canadian soldiers in Montreal. The man is eventually shot and killed by authorities.
- October 22, 2014: A Canadian man with Jihadist sympathies shoots a Canadian soldier at a war memorial in Ottawa and then proceeds to enter the Parliament building before being killed by authorities.
- October 23, 2014: A American man with Jihadist sympathies in New York City attacks Police Officers with a hatchet.

If done well, this leaderless resistance/lone wolf strategy provides little or no warning of a pending operation. As a result, the importance of awareness on the part of individual citizens has become even more important to the prevention of terrorism (Stewart 2014). This change in terrorist strategy will require those engaged in Crisis Management to be prepared to deal with the implications of both large scale attacks, as well as smaller, but more frequent, acts of aggression.

#### Post-9/11 Era: The Private Sector

As is typical with high profile events, the initial reaction to the September 11 attacks was a flurry of activity to examine organizational security and business continuity issues. Budgets temporarily increased, as did the overall interest in security products and services. As time passed and attacks on the homeland were prevented in the short term, a separation process began to take hold. As one may expect, companies that deemed their risks to be lower reduced their budgets to pre-9/11 levels and went back to business as usual. Firms deemed to be at higher risk, such as utility companies, financial institutions, public venues, and organizations designated as critical infrastructure by the Department of Homeland Security, changed their security programs more significantly. Not surprisingly, the level of commitment to security, business continuity, crisis management, and disaster recovery expressed by the private sector is a result of perceived risk, vulnerability, potential impacts to operations, and a changing regulatory environment.

Since the war on terrorism has become a long-term feature of US foreign and domestic policy, security, crisis management, business continuity, disaster recovery, and related disciplines are seeing and will continue to see the following changes:

1. While some terrorist organizations may still try to conduct spectacular operations, far more attempts will focus on low level, conventional terrorist attacks by lone wolf operatives.
2. Weapons of mass destruction will eventually be used against the United States.
3. Out of necessity, increased cooperation will occur between the public and private sector.
4. As critical infrastructure becomes more protected, soft targets such as shopping malls, schools, and movie theaters will become terrorist targets.

5. The demands for high quality security personnel will increase.
6. Government regulation regarding the selection and training of security personnel will increase.
7. Government regulation of recovery-related activities in the private sector will increase.
8. Demand for people with professional certifications, training and formal education in security management, business continuity, crisis management, and disaster recovery will increase.
9. The need for general education of the populace on terrorism and related issues will significantly increase.
10. Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) will become a more prominent part of public safety.

## Summary

Both public and private sector organizations are becoming increasingly aware of the need to plan for the effective management of critical incidents. Security managers and supervisors are expected not only to prepare well-written plans for these events but also to have a plan in place that works and is understood by all. This requires that the plan be tested through training, thereby ensuring that responding personnel can immediately initiate emergency management operations. Besides helping to define the technical, interpersonal, and organizational dynamics of critical incident management, these activities assist emergency responders to become familiar with the roles and responsibilities of all personnel, including outside groups and agencies, at the scene of a critical incident.

## References

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