

TerranearPMC Safety Share

Week of January 19, 2015 – Proper Response and Preparation to a Terrorist Attack

After waking up this morning to the news of the terrorist attack in Paris, and listening to the response around the world, it seems that, yet again, we can see a new paradigm with the regards to how our lives will be altered – forever- by such brazen, callous and thoughtless actions. With the advent of 9-11, many journalists identified this single day as when everything changed. The United States could no longer be protected by its obvious geographical location. Sometimes a community is terrorized by a lone gunman who believes he/she is acting in the name of freedom or some other political cause. Other times it is a group of international radicals with an extreme viewpoint and is determined to gain attention on the world's stage. With the recent attack in Paris, the target being the offices of the satirical magazine, Charlie Hebdo, it is clear that such events are becoming more commonplace; yet the trail of terror and grief seems to be as poignant as ever.

Regardless of the apparent political message behind such terror attacks, many people understand that we have reached an age where we, as individuals need to take on a certain level of responsibility as far as knowing what to do when confronted with such violence.

Without a doubt, there is danger in the world; that does not mean people have to hide under their beds and wait for something tragic to happen. Nor should people count on a government to save them from every potential threat. Even very effective military, counterterrorism, law enforcement and homeland security efforts cannot succeed in eliminating the threat because the extent of potential actors is simply too large and dispersed. There are, however, common-sense security measures that people should take regardless of the threat level. According to security experts, apathy, denial and complacency can result in very serious consequences. This means that we, as individuals need to take responsibility for our own security. Past events have shown that the resources of any government are finite and the authorities simply cannot be everywhere and stop every terrorist act. The following are few things we need to keep in mind should we ever be confronted with a situation where we feel our safety is being threatened due to a person or groups of people acting in an aggressive manner.

Situational Awareness: The foundation upon which all personal security measures are built is situational awareness. Before any measures can be taken, one must first recognize that threats exist. Ignorance or denial of a threat and paying no attention to one's surroundings make a person's chances of quickly recognizing a threat and then reacting in time to avoid it quite remote. Only pure luck or the attacker's incompetence can save such a person. For instance, recently I was walking down a dark street at night and there was a woman walking a few yards in front of me. Not once did she check her surroundings to see who was behind her. OK, I admit it, I am not what one would describe as an intimidating figure, yet without examining the immediate area, one is leaving themselves open to an “at risk” situation for an unwanted encounter.



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Preparedness: In the immediate wake of a terrorist attack or some other disaster, disorder and confusion are often widespread as a number of things happen simultaneously. Frequently, panic erupts as people attempt to flee the immediate scene of the attack. At the same time, police, fire and emergency medical units all attempt to respond to the scene, so there can be terrible traffic and pedestrian crowd-control problems. This effect can be magnified by smoke and fire, which can impair vision, affect breathing and increase the sense of panic. Indeed, frequently many of the injuries produced by terrorist bombings are not a direct result of the blast or even shrapnel but are caused by smoke inhalation and trampling.

Travel Security: Of course, not all emergencies occur close to home, and the current U.S. government warning was issued for citizens traveling in Europe. Obviously, the need to practice situational awareness applies during travel as much as it does anywhere else. There are, however, other small steps that can be taken to help keep one safe from criminals and terrorists when away from home. For instance, In recent years, terrorists have frequently targeted hotels, which became attractive soft targets when embassies and other diplomatic missions began hardening their security. This means that travelers should not only look at the cost of a hotel room but also carefully consider the level of security provided by a hotel before they make a choice. In past attacks, such as the November 2005 hotel bombings in Amman, Jordan, the attackers surveyed a number of facilities and selected those they felt were the most vulnerable. Location is also a critical consideration. Hotels that are close to significant landmarks or hotels that are themselves landmarks should be considered carefully.

Perspective: It is important to keep any terrorist threat in perspective. Threats of violence have always existed, and the threat posed to Europe by extremists today is not much different from events that have occurred a few generations ago. Indeed, far more people (including tourists) will be affected by crime than terrorism in Europe this year, and more people will be killed in European car accidents than terrorist attacks.

If people live their lives in a constant state of fear, those who seek to terrorize them have won. Terror attacks are a tactic used by a variety of militant groups for a variety of ends. As the name implies, terrorism is intended to produce a psychological impact that far outweighs the actual physical damage caused by the attack itself. Denying would-be terrorists this multiplication effect, as the British largely did after the July 2005 subway bombings, prevents them from accomplishing their greater goals. Security experts agree that terror can be countered when people assume the proper mindset and then take basic security measures and practice relaxed awareness. These elements work together to dispel paranoia and to prevent the fear of terrorism from robbing people of the joy of life.

**I do not agree with what you have to say, but I'll defend to the death
your right to say it. - Voltaire**

Je Suis Charlie Hebdo!

