

COUNTERTERRORISM
THE PATROL OFFICERS ROLE

by

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The Command College Futures Study Project is a FUTURES study of a particular emerging issue of relevance to law enforcement. Its purpose is NOT to predict the future; rather, to project a variety of possible scenarios useful for strategic planning in anticipation of the emerging landscape facing policing organizations.

This journal article was created using the futures forecasting process of Command College and its outcomes. Defining the future differs from analyzing the past, because it has not yet happened. In this article, methodologies have been used to discern useful alternatives to enhance the success of planners and leaders in their response to a range of possible future environments.

Managing the future means influencing it—creating, constraining and adapting to emerging trends and events in a way that optimizes the opportunities and minimizes the threats of relevance to the profession.

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Counterterrorism

The Patrol Officers Role

A terrorist attack in the U.S. is imminent! This is the message National Intelligence Director Dennis Blair shared with members of the Senate Intelligence Committee on February 2, 2010 when he told them “Al Qaeda is almost ‘certain’ to try major attacks on the U.S. in the next three to six months.”¹ While not on the same scale as the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Blair said they will be smaller and more geographically dispersed, making them harder to detect and disrupt, with the purpose of instilling fear in the American public.² Who has the best opportunity to counter this threat?

Fred Burton, former Deputy Chief of the Counterterrorism Division of the State Department’s Diplomatic Security Service, believes patrol officers working a beat have more of a chance to encounter a terrorist and stopping an attack on US soil than federal agents.³ Therefore, it is crucial local law enforcement agencies consistently study the behavior and tactics of both foreign and domestic terrorist organizations to better understand their growing threats. Information gleaned from their research will help to determine the training and equipment patrol officers will require for being in the best position to successfully prevent or counter such attacks.

Understanding the Evolving Threat

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, nearly thirty terrorist plots involving targets within the United States have been uncovered and stopped.⁴ Ten of the thirty were discovered during 2009 alone.⁵ The increased level of activity and change in tactics reaffirms the commitment of terrorists to carry out attacks in the United States. As a result of continued

U.S. attacks against al-Qaeda's infrastructure, however, the latest assessment of by U.S. counterterrorism experts indicates the terrorist organization's ability to carry out a large-scale attack has been greatly diminished. This has left al-Qaeda scrambling to maintain its legitimacy as a leader amongst Islamic jihadist groups worldwide. Subsequently, al-Qaeda has begun accelerating its plans for attacking the United States.⁶

The attempted Christmas Day bombing of a trans-Atlantic Northwest Airlines flight over the skies of Detroit is an example of al-Qaeda's changing tactics. A lone al-Qaeda operative tried to ignite an improvised explosive device (IED) concealed in his pants as the flight was descending to land. Counterterrorism analysts believe his intent was to damage the airplane hull enough to bring it down onto residential areas along the landing flight path of the airport.⁷ The resulting crash would have killed everyone onboard and possibly hundreds on the ground.⁸ Former Deputy Assistant Director of the FBI, Danny Coulson, identified another disturbing trend amongst the uncovered terror plots.

An increasing number of terror plots involve American homegrown terrorists sympathetic to Islamic Extremist philosophies. With no direct ties to any of the major terrorist organizations, these individuals and small groups are unpredictable and harder to detect. They have the ability to move around the country undetected, with the capability to strike anywhere. Because members of these groups are very familiar with one another, it is nearly impossible to infiltrate and stop them during the initial planning stages. Subsequently, a majority of the American homegrown terrorist plots have stopped only when well into the planning stages.⁹ These are not short-term efforts. In fact, the plot to blow up the jet fuel depot at the John F. Kennedy Airport in 2007 had been in the planning stages for almost ten years before it was discovered and neutralized.¹⁰

Similarly, the attack by U.S. Army Major Nidal Hasan at Fort Hood, Texas on November 5, 2009 demonstrated the devastating effects one gunman could have on a nation. Identified as an Islamic Extremist, Hasan shot and killed 13 people and wounded another 31 before he was stopped by a local police officer who shot him soon after she arrived on scene. While not initially categorized as a terrorist attack, it was reported Major Hassan was heavily influenced by al-Qaeda's philosophies on jihad, and he had tried to contact al-Qaeda's leaders months prior to his attack.¹¹

Each of these terrorist activities presents their own unique challenge for local law enforcement agencies. The tactics used by terrorists demonstrate they have developed the motivation and ability to attack anywhere at any time, even when simply armed with conventional explosives or firearms. It is imperative, now more than ever, for local law enforcement to increase their commitment levels to provide patrol officers with the necessary training for counterterrorism intelligence gathering and SWAT tactics. This includes providing the necessary tactical equipment to meet this challenge. It also means sending patrol officers to both advanced tactical and Terrorism Liaison Officer (TLO) courses.

Intelligence Gathering Efforts and Training

Following the 9/11 attacks, the Bush administration created the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and committed funding for the expansion of the counterterrorism intelligence gathering efforts throughout the country. Fusion Centers, designed for the collection, evaluation, and dissemination of data related to domestic and foreign terrorist activities, were created in each state. Twenty additional regional Fusion Centers were created in areas with a heavy concentration of potential terrorist targets.¹² Joint Terrorism Task Forces (JTTFs) almost tripled

in number from 35 to 100 in the years following the 9/11 attacks.¹³ Housed across the country, the JTTFs are responsible for the investigative and operational activities of counterterrorism efforts on U.S. soil.¹⁴ JTTFs teams are comprised of law enforcement officers on the federal, state, and local levels. Some local areas also created multi-jurisdictional agencies to more fully prepare to fight this emerging challenge.

Several Los Angeles County police chiefs founded the Terrorism Advisory Group (TAG) shortly after the 9/11 attacks to explore the idea of creating local counterterrorism programs.¹⁵ From TAG, the Terrorism Liaison Officer (TLO) program evolved with the purpose of training first responders (i.e., police, fire, health, or public works) on how to prepare for and respond to terrorist activity occurring in and around their respective jurisdictions.¹⁶ While the TLO program was first created and implemented in Los Angeles County, it is now in place in eight states from California to Washington D.C.¹⁷ The TLO program is a useful tool for patrol officers, as it teaches them how to effectively handle terrorism intelligence and interact with other law enforcement agencies involved in counterterrorism efforts.¹⁸

TLO Programs

The introductory (8 hour) and advanced (24 hour) TLO courses provide relevant and beneficial information for patrol officers working the street. Topics include, but are not limited to, domestic terrorism, 4th generation warfare and modern conflict, terrorism intelligence collection, community and counterterrorism information networking, officer safety, analyzing potential threats, and TLO roles and responsibilities.¹⁹ The advanced course provides more in depth instruction on what types of intelligence should be collected and forwarded to Fusion Centers and JTTFs for evaluation. TLO certified officers are kept up-to-date on counterterrorism

trends, threats, and other terrorist related activities, occurring domestically and abroad, through daily e-mails distributed by their local Fusion Center.

Attending TLO courses are typically easy, convenient, and cost efficient. It is also not necessary to be an assigned TLO to be eligible to attend. Courses are sponsored by state and regional Fusion Centers at no charge for the attendee, other than travel and subsistence if officers must travel a significant distance to attend the class.

The TLO program provides vital training for patrol officers. They, in turn, have the ability to provide an immense amount of street level intelligence for fusion centers and JTTFs to assess. Every piece of collected intelligence has the potential of being the key that uncovers a terrorist plot before an attack takes place. In addition to the collection of intelligence, the following are some of the more significant benefits TLO-trained patrol officers provide for their respective agencies:

- The ability to respond to and properly assess critical incidents involving terrorist activity
- The ability to assist in the development of appropriate counterterrorism training exercises
- The ability to develop counterterrorism plans for events occurring in their jurisdictions
- Training to conduct follow up investigations on suspicious incidents possibly involving terrorist activity
- Better threat assessments of critical infrastructures, businesses, and schools and provide recommendations on how to better protect these locations²⁰

The expected outcome of sending as many patrol officers as possible through the TLO program would be a comprehensive network of trained counterterrorism officers working every city street across the nation. This not only benefits the work of antiterrorism agencies, but also serves to fulfill the basic mission of policing in every community; that of safety.

Completing the Loop of Intelligence Information

While the TLO program is certainly beneficial to patrol officers, it lacks an effective means of information sharing from the JTTFs down to patrol officers. According to Fred Burton, JTTFs do not provide local law enforcement agencies with intelligence on active terrorism investigations, as a security measure. Consequently, patrol officers are unaware they should take precautionary measures during routine contacts with suspected terrorists. Conversely, potentially important information on suspected terrorists may remain with patrol officers, as they are not aware of the investigation.

In an effort to resolve this problem, representatives from local law enforcement agencies and JTTFs should meet on a regular basis to discuss counterterrorism measures and information. Joint training and practical exercises will allow officers to become familiar with one another and build trust amongst the agencies. Through these contacts patrol officers will be able to demonstrate their knowledge, training, professionalism, trustworthiness, and commitment to counterterrorism efforts. As the bond between the agencies grows, JTTFs will become comfortable with releasing sensitive investigative information to local law enforcement agencies recognizing patrol officers are valuable tool in their counterterrorism efforts.

Certainly, it is just as important for peace officers to respond to acts of potential terrorism. In addition to TLO training, the equipment and tactical training provided to them will affect their ability to successfully stop or mitigate the terrorists' actions.

Training and Equipment

As security measures at government and military facilities improve across the nation, terrorist groups have begun refocusing their attention to attack locations frequented by the public with little or no security. These are commonly referred to as soft targets.²¹ They are comprised of, but not limited to, schools, shopping centers, buses, trains, places of worship, hospitals, and nightclubs, are located in every county and municipality across the U.S.²² As noted by B. Raman, Director of the Institute For Topical Studies in India, the sheer number of soft targets far outweigh the available resources needed to prevent such an attack from taking place at anyone of these locations.²³ Subsequently, relying upon their prior training and equipment in their patrol vehicles, first responding patrol officers will bear the burden of suppressing such attacks.

The majority of counterterrorism training available for patrol officers, including the TLO program, focuses on the gathering of intelligence related to potential terrorist activity. They teach officers where to look for information and how to forward it to their local fusion center or JTTF. Others provide officers with a chronological history lesson on the evolution of terrorism and why they should be concerned for the safety of their communities. Very few focus, though, on *tactics* for patrol officers' arriving on the scene of terrorist attacks actively taking place. These types of classes are typically targeted for Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams that traditionally handle high risk situations beyond the capabilities of patrol officers.

Sgt. Glenn French, a 19-year law enforcement veteran with 12 years of SWAT experience, recommends patrol officers receive training on SWAT tactical skills and knowledge to better prepare them for what lies ahead.²⁴ Initial training courses, instructed by SWAT certified instructors, should include; building clearing techniques, close quarter combat (CQB) drills, live fire exercises at moving targets, open field and urban movement, setting up fields of fire, and perimeter responsibilities. Unlike existing active shooter training, responding patrol officers must be taught the incident they are responding to may be a diversion from other attacks planned to take place after they arrive. As emphasized by John Giduck, a leading expert on terrorism, officers must consider their resources and make their commitments flexible in order to effectively counter additional attacks in their area.²⁵

According to Earl Sweeney, a retired chief of police and director of the New Hampshire Police Standards and Training Council, the implementation of annual training plans, incorporating the Field Training Officer (FTO) program, roll-call training, and annual in-house tactical up date courses, would assist patrol officers' in the retention of their tactical skills.²⁶ To be more cost effective and time efficient, local law enforcement agencies should provide in house instructors with the flexibility to train around patrol officer schedules. This means agencies with SWAT teams could use their SWAT officers as instructors. Those agencies without SWAT officers could send a few officers to train-the-trainer courses or they could invite officers from allied agencies to teach their staff. However, tactical training will only go so far unless patrol officers are provided the equipment necessary to counter terrorist attacks.

The acquirement, training, and use of specialized equipment will enhance the capabilities of patrol officers. Heavy duty bullet proof vests, flash bang diversionary devices, smoke grenades, bullet proof shields and blankets, and automatic rifles, all maintained in patrol vehicles

with bullet proof body and windows, will provide officers with the tools necessary to adequately respond to acts of terrorism, at a moment's notice. While these items are not required for normal patrol duties, agencies must consider the negative consequences of having ill-equipped patrol officers attempting to stop a terrorist attack in progress.

Funding for specialized equipment and training can be provided through several sources including grants. In particular, the FY 2010 Federal Preparedness Grant Program is comprised of 13 separate grants for homeland security training and equipment. Information and application criteria can be found on the Bureau of Justice Assistance web site.²⁷ Additional grant programs can be found at PoliceGrantsHelp.com, which provides one of the most extensive databases of federal, state, local, and corporate grants on the web. The use of redevelopment agency (RDA) and capital expenditure funds for law enforcement officers and equipment are also becoming more common.²⁸ Of course, during these uncertain economic times, funding creativity is a must.

Conclusion

Terrorist attacks are unpredictable in nature, as only the terrorists know when, where, and how they will strike. Their evolving tactics, with quick strike capabilities anywhere at any time, carry significant implications for the future of policing in America. With soft targets such as schools, shopping centers, and public transportation in every community, local law enforcement agencies cannot ignore the possibility that terrorist attacks might occur in their city.

To counter this new and evolving threat, patrol officers must recognize and act on the knowledge the intelligence they gather at the street level provides the best opportunity to stop terrorist attacks in their planning stages. Law enforcement agencies must recognize not every terrorist plot will be stopped, and patrol officers will be the first responders on scene to counter

such an attack. It is, therefore, incumbent upon local law enforcement to provide patrol officers with the necessary training and equipment to successfully defeat these attacks. In essence, the local patrol officer working the street has become the domestic foot soldier in America's war on terrorism.

End Notes

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