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The Dangerous Face Of Terrorism: Are We Safe For The Holidays?

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In the light of dusk, a convoy of plain trucks moves quietly through the subdivisions. The trucks stop near a shopping mall. Soon, a specially trained team of men in gas masks and chemical-protection suits meanders through the packed parking lot. The only thing they know is that a small explosive device was detonated in the cooling and fresh air supply systems in the mall, spreading fumes that sickened scores of children, shoppers and mall employees. In cooperation with local emergency personnel, the four men cautiously enter the contaminated area to find out what happened. What did the device unleash? Anthrax? Nerve gas?

The men walk slowly toward the mall, bringing with them an assortment of equipment for chemical analysis. There are many people lying on the floors, some breathing painfully, while others are not moving. Many are pleading for help while others are panicking. No one can enter or leave because the device has not been identified. The men reach a small room where they find the remains of the explosive device. Their mission is delicate, requiring the handling of tiny detection kits and the moving of heavy objects.

Soon, their masks steam up. The effort is taxing, even for trained men. In less than ten minutes, the residue is identified. "Positive hit on anthrax," affirms the chemist accompanying the men.

This event is not as dangerous as it sounds. It was a drill concocted by The VonFrederick Group, testing the team's response to a smuggled gas attack somewhere in the United States during the holiday season. The group is a part of the Weapons of Mass Destruction Support Team. Such teams are assigned to assess the scope and severity of a new breed of terrorist attacks by analyzing suspected germs, chemicals, or radioactive material.

Confirming a shift in the behavior of terrorists, CIA Director Porter Goss, when he was chairman of the House Intelligence Committee observed; "We're having to graduate from our old thinking about state-sponsored terrorism, to terrorism's new look. We're facing an increasingly cause-sponsored terrorism."

Terrorism's emerging new look embraces actions and strategies that may be harder to prevent or combat. More and more, terrorists are able to utilize new technologies and secure independent financing. Reports *USA Today*: "New computer and communications technology and links with organized crime make terrorism even more difficult to combat." The new look also involves new targets, called soft targets. Soft targets are anything that does not have the capability to fight back and presents an easy kill, such as

children, unsuspecting people, hospitals, malls movie theaters, schools, restaurants, dance halls, churches, buses, trains, planes, and sporting events. The new look has also forced reporters and news analysts to coin such expressions as, “cyberterrorism,” “bioterrorism,” and “ecoterrorism.” While beheading is not new to terrorists, it has recently grown in popularity as a way to show the world that they “mean business;” an entirely new departure for today’s terrorist.

How threatening is the new face of terrorism? Is your personal security threatened? Is there a solution to the plague of international terrorism? How safe are we for the holidays?