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Terrorism in Middle Town, U.S.A.

By Guest Author Officer Travis Ruby

In a classroom lecture Mr. Franklin Craig stated that Greenburg defined terrorism as “a group that gains power by specifically targeting innocent, random, powerless civilians to globally publish a grievance.” I agree with most of this definition. I do not agree with the statement about random targets. Terrorists are cold and calculated. They select their targets very carefully for effect. The second part of the definition should be that terrorists select targets based on the following two criteria: What is the psychological effect and what is the economical effect?

The last two questions are what help terrorists decide which targets are most important. On September 11, 2001 terrorists engaged and attempted to engage several targets. The first target, both towers of the World Trade Center, affected both the economical and psychological aspects of an attack. It psychologically affected both Americans and the Ummah, the mass of the Muslim people. Economically they attacked the World Trade Center because it represented the global economy; also it would take millions of dollars to repair the damage. Terrorists attacked the heart of the American military, the Pentagon. The final attack did not happen on the White House. Psychologically they devastated two of the most impressive engineering projects in recent history. Terrorists could and would attack the American public inside of America. The terrorists also sent a message to the Ummah, “We can get to Americans inside of America’s defenses!” The terrorists responsible for this attack were patient and calculated. Economically, the attacks did cost Americans millions of dollars both in property lost to damage and what will be spent rebuilding those structures. The collective attacks on that day seriously altered the way Americans live. There is no longer the safety bubble that they live in. Now, Americans know that they can be brutally attacked in their own cities without provocation. Those attacks happened in highly populated metropolitan cities. Why should people in small towns across America care?

There is nothing of value in these areas. There are no national parks, large amusement parks, global banks, or headquarters for multi-national corporations. What these towns do have is anonymity coupled with familiarity (Spagnolo). What that means is that this area is small enough that people do not come here unless they have a reason, like visiting family. Californians do not go to the Boise area to vacation. New Yorkers do go to Omaha to taste genuine Nebraska corn. Non-residents do not travel these areas unless they have family, business, or are just passing through. That is what gives the cities like Missoula and Albuquerque anonymity.

The familiarity comes with the knowledge that these cities exist. Most anyone has heard of Anchorage. They are likely to think or say that Anchorage is cold and has ice. People associate the name Anchorage with Alaska. It is that familiarity that makes it similar to cities like: Akron, Ohio; Springfield, Missouri; Scranton, Pennsylvania; and others. What these cities also have in common is the image that they are the heart of Middle

Town America. Many foreigners think of America like the Wild West. It is filled with gunslingers, farmers, ranchers, and cowboys. Boise is in a very pro-gun state.

Many believe the main export comes from farming potatoes. Lewis and Clark took part of their trek through this area. Many counties have huge rodeos that the Professional Rodeo Association often visits. The Treasure Valley is a perfect target for terrorists because foreigners see all of these things as what symbolizes America.

When I surveyed several people, I asked if they thought medium sized cities would be good terrorist targets they often said no. When I asked what they thought would be good targets they often answered with small airports or local dams. These two do initially appear to have the highest profile, but according to Agent Joe Hess, FBI, they are not at the top of the list for target consideration. Small airports typically do not have international or transcontinental flights. Runways are small, and although they might be easier to access than LAX, they do not provide as many targets for terrorists.

Agent Hess does not think that smaller dams would be attacked with missiles or bombs from the outside. He reported that security getting into and out of the smaller dams is not very strong. Hess stated that many of the terrorists are extremely educated. They often have engineering degrees. He thinks they would more than likely take over the dam and create the most damage from the inside. MSgt. Spagnolo said that the terrorists could get inside the dam and shut the gates. Then they would just wait for the dam to overflow and flood the valley. He also stated that local agencies have already coordinated with the National Guard to fire at the dam gates to prevent the dam from overflowing.

Fuel farms are what concerned Hess the most. Boise has a twenty-eight-tank oil depot and is a hub for oil transport in the northwest. The oil farm supplies oil to much of the northwest, including cities in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada, and Utah. Spagnolo described that burning oil needs lots of oxygen to burn. Burning oil will create a vacuum effect that will start to pull objects such as trees, people, cars and trucks into it. This is so that it can gain more oxygen and continue to burn. This effect can be so strong that if an attack were to take place off the coast of New York while tankers were emptying their loads into the massive fuel farm, the ensuing fire would pull parts of Manhattan into it (Spagnolo).

There are several targets in medium sized cities such as local universities. Many of these universities have gained national attention through the success of their athletic teams. Terrorists could target the football stadium during a sold out game or the Student Union Building during registration, or the first week of school. The dormitories would be excellent targets for a hostage type attack, similar to the one that happened recently in Russia. Another institution of higher learning would be the Christian based colleges. Muslim terrorists could not make a better target than Western Christians who are attempting to educate themselves.

Local malls have already been subject to surveillance by known terrorist associates. The FBI has followed them all the way to Canada to investigate (Hess). It would be easy to walk into a mall during the height of the Christmas shopping season, set down several

nicely wrapped packages, and then disappear into the crowd. The explosive packages could be set to explode on a timer, by a remote device, or motion activated. If package bombs were set off in ten cities across the nation in medium sized malls it would not structurally crush the malls, but psychologically and economically it would practically end Christmas shopping (Spagnolo).

The effort to prevent attacks must start with realizing that Middle Town, USA is a good target. Next, law enforcement agencies at all levels must work together, share information, train together, and prepare for terrorist attacks. Prepare response plans for possible targets. Identify which agencies will perform specific tasks during emergency responses. Once the peace keepers are on line with each other, they have the arduous task of educating the public without creating a mass hysteria. People fear what they do not understand. Fear coupled with a little knowledge often leads to mobs, riots, and total chaos.

It is also important to understand the mindset and the hate terror groups have for Americans. It stems from the World War II era. Many Jewish people fled Europe for a safe place to live and raise their families. They bought much of the land inside of Palestine. At first, the new Jewish immigrants built good relationships with their Palestinian neighbors. It was not until post WW II, when Westerners decided that the Jewish community should become the independent state of Israel. Terrorist leaders like Osama Bin Laden hate to see Western influences, like denim jeans, Nike shoes, and t-shirts. They hate it so much that they often have language scholars review Arabic words to make sure they are not too American (Spagnolo).

Terrorists do not fear death. They consider it an honor to die carrying out a fatwah. If it is not a suicide mission, and they can avoid death, they will. If they cannot, they will die with honor (Spagnolo). They are often extremely educated (Hess). They are dedicated to their cause and to completing the fatwahs they have received.

These are all reasons why Middle Town, USA is a great target. It is the heart of America and has numerous targets. They include any densely populated places, schools, parks, amusement parks, and any government building. Targets include things that will hurt the economy, like fuel farms and malls. They also include things that will kill people, like the dams.

If the terrorists attack Boise and several cities across the nation similar in size, Americans will live in fear for many years. Terrorists have already been successful in a multi-pronged attack once. Now that the West is on alert for terrorist attacks, communication and planning are the keys to preventing future attacks. Remember their goal is not to topple buildings, but to topple their enemies' spirit, and make them live in fear.

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