



Global Terrorism, Political Instability and International Crime Council July 2007

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Council Newsletter is Launched

Welcome to the first edition of the quarterly newsletter of the Global Terrorism, Political Instability and International Crime Council. The newsletter will outline the Council's activities, highlight key initiatives by Council members, and provide unique insights into emerging terrorism and international crime issues.

This edition features the following articles:

- **Highlights of Council's 25th Annual Conference: "Managing Risk in an Uncertain World" (See Below)**
- **"Future Threat: The Use of Fire as a Terrorist Tool," by Council Vice Chair Michael R Bouchard and ATF ASAC Scott Sweetow (See Page 2)**
- **"In the Wake of Virginia Tech: Meeting the Challenge of Campus Security," by Council Member, Dr. Stephen Sloan, University Professor & Fellow, University of Central Florida (See Page 3)**

Managing Risk in an Uncertain World

If you had attended the Council's 25th Annual Conference in March 2007, you would have been well prepared to come to terms with the attempted car bombings in London and the airport attack in Glasgow.

Presenters at the conference, entitled "Managing Risk in an Uncertain World," provided unique insights and perspectives into the changing face of terrorism.

Especially noteworthy was the presentation of Dr. Anne Speckhard, Adjunct Professor, Georgetown University Medical School. She described her first-hand empirical research into what she calls "suicide terrorism" – how these human bombs are primed, and how they may be defused. Dr. Speckhard recalled that after 9/11, she didn't believe there was a great likelihood of suicide bomb attacks against shopping malls in America. Now, as suicide terrorism gains traction, she said (presciently) that such attacks in the West are a growing possibility.

As Council members begin laying the groundwork for the 2008 seminar, their focus will remain on providing attendees with leading-edge insights.

“Future Threat: The Use of Fire as a Terrorist Tool,” by Michael R. Bouchard, Council Vice-Chair, and ATF ASAC Scott Sweetow

Large vehicle borne improvised explosive devices (LVBIEDs), chemical weapons and radiological dispersal devices (RDDs) - also known colloquially as “dirty bombs,” often leap to mind when considering possible terrorist tactics as we enter the dawn of what the Bush administration and Pentagon have taken to calling “the long war.”

Examining the aforementioned modalities, and excepting the more recent phenomenon of Iraqi insurgents using chlorine gas canisters in conjunction with LVBIEDs, chemical attacks have been thankfully rare, and limited to small fatality events like the 1995 *Aum Shinrikyo* sarin nerve gas attack on a Japanese subway. “Dirty bombs” remain largely the stuff of dire predictions and television. Although not exclusive to the Middle East, LVBIEDs are predominantly associated with that region of the world. While LVBIEDs, chemical weapons and RDDs have attracted a lot of attention over the last several years, the more prosaic and deadly reality of terrorism typically manifests itself globally with firearms and much smaller improvised explosive devices (IEDs), which nevertheless have caused many thousands of casualties over the same period.

On the domestic front, while the U.S. has suffered two classic LVBIED attacks in the last 15 years, only one of them was at the hands of foreign-supported terrorists, that being the 1993 World Trade Center bombing – killing 6, while the other occurred in 1995 when homegrown extremist Timothy McVeigh parked an explosives-laden truck in front of the Murrah federal building in 1995, destroying the structure and killing 168 souls.

Poorly studied and rarely mentioned as a tool of terrorists is the use of fire, a low-tech, reliable and deadly tactic which has *already* been used to commit the worst terrorist event ever--the September 11, 2001 suicide airliner attacks on the World Trade Center towers and the ensuing fires. Consider the following from Osama bin Laden on November 9, 2001:

“...We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy, who would be killed based on the position of the tower.... Due to my experience in this field, I was thinking that the fire from the gas in the plane would melt the iron structure of the building and collapse the area where the plane hit and all the floors above it only. This is all we had hoped for.”

On February 19, 2007, the Samjhauta (“Friendship”) express train between India and Pakistan was targeted by suspected Islamist extremists with several suitcase IEDs containing digital timers, bottles of flammable liquids and an ignition charge. Two of the devices functioned; 68 people were killed and scores injured by the direct effects of fire and smoke inhalation.

Fire causes instinctive fear amongst people in a primal way that is difficult to match with other tactics; it is ancient and “easy”. To match this threat, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco Firearms and Explosives is the federal government’s lead agency in the criminal investigation of fires, as exemplified by a world-class Fire Research Laboratory, National Response Teams, Fire Protection Engineers and Special Agent Certified Fire Investigators.

One need only do a quick search of news stories to see a sampling of spectacular casualties meted out through both accidental and intentional fires:

- 1942 - The Cocoanut Grove nightclub fire, Boston, MA resulted in 492 killed and hundreds more injured; it was accidentally ignited by a busboy using a match for light to replace a burned out light bulb.
- 2000 - The Luoyang China dance hall fire left 309 dead, largely from suffocation; an investigation blamed sub-standard fire suppression and alarm systems.
- 2003 - “The Station” nightclub fire in Rhode Island killed 100 and injured 200; pyrotechnics ignited available combustibles.
- 2003 - A fire at Jung-ro Station, South Korea left 198 dead and 147 injured; the suspect had lighter and two milk cartons of flammable liquid.
- 2004 – A Paraguay supermarket fire left 364 dead and 256 injured; exits were locked to prevent shoplifting.

The above tragedies, all of which killed more than 100 people, begs a further examination of more common fires around the country where scores of people were killed or injured when means of egress were blocked, and then asking if we are facing a strategic vulnerability. It would be the height of hubris to think terrorists *aren't* savvy enough to look back at these events and draw from them some lessons. *Al Qaeda* has demonstrated the ability to learn from mistakes and make course corrections. A growing body of evidence seems to indicate fire has been both studied and inculcated into the terrorist's bag of tricks.

Consider that in the recent Virginia Tech massacre, a single mentally disturbed individual was able to inflict mass casualties, undoubtedly aided by chaining shut available exits, presumably to prevent the escape of victims as well as to impede law enforcement. Switching now to fire, how long would it take a few determined people to chain and lock exit doors in a theater, mall, hotel or other business and then set fire(s) with accelerants, perhaps remaining inside to shoot at fleeing, panicked crowds? How difficult would it be to shut down a fire suppression system and immediately thereafter set a fire? While some would consider this a bizarre course of action, it is worth noting that *al Qaeda* and other violent Islamic extremists are not deterred by the thought of perishing with their victims in a suicide attack; far from it.

As we march forward in "the long war," it is worth examining more closely such asymmetric threats as using fire as a tool for terror and mass casualties and then asking ourselves: are we prepared for these scenarios?

"In the Wake of Virginia Tech: Meeting the Challenge of Campus Security," by Dr. Stephen Sloan

The massacre of 32 people and the wounding of numerous others at Virginia Tech tragically served to underscore that even the idealized tranquility of a college campus can be shattered by the reality of mass violence. As the events of 16 April unfold, there will continue to be many questions concerning how and why the horrendous event took place, and there will be no easy answers.

Yet for those especially involved, security in general, and especially in-campus security, there are profoundly painful lessons that must be learned to seek to avoid the repetition of other outbreaks in the future. One lesson that might prove useful is to analytically view the massacre as a failure of the existence or development and application of an intelligence process that might have prevented the tragedy. Stated candidly, had there been a systematic collection of information on the troubled mass murderer, had the information been appropriately disseminated and had the end result led to the use of actionable intelligence, the students, faculty, staff and administration might have taken appropriate measures to address what were clearly indications and warnings that one of the students had a history of mental instability that could lead to acts of violence.

While it is understandable that it is difficult to predict the actions that might be taken by a highly mentally unstable individual, one can nevertheless suggest that the mass murder on campus was a profound illustration of a major failure of campus intelligence associated with the mental status of one of the students. If 9/11 was a profound wake-up call for the crucial role of intelligence in combating terrorism, the events at Virginia Tech also serve as a warning that a campus intelligence process can help protect—to literally protect—the members of a physical academic community to the realities of violence in its many forms.



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