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The Dangers of Complacency in the Age of Indiscriminant Terrorism

Recent world events have challenged the private sector to confront and manage previously unthinkable situations that threaten the security of the American infrastructure. All the traditional risks are still out there; by far the majority of crises are still caused by preventable threats such as poor communication, simple complacency, rules being disregarded, sabotage by disgruntled employees and carelessness generated by an expectation that insurance will cover damages. This issue of The Lipman Report will examine the relationship between complacency and terrorism in view of some of the more contemporary and ominous threats to the security of the United States. Since the private sector is responsible for 85% of the American economy, the vast burden for shouldering these threats, particularly in this age of globalization and extended supply chains, rests with the private sector.

Experts since 9/11 have examined the American infrastructure and concluded that the Federal government has done a less-than-adequate job of preparing for another calamitous event on the scale of 9/11 or Hurricane Katrina. As a result of extensive academic research and efforts to identify vulnerabilities, the government has been taking corrective measures in the area of preparedness and response, especially in the domain of first responders. A great deal of effort and expense, as well as political capital, has been dedicated to identifying hostile elements abroad and destroying them at their source. Additional comprehensive steps have been taken in order to prevent these elements from entering the United States.

While the United States government has for years been struggling to develop countermeasures and strategies in the wake of 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, the private sector has been researching and implementing new practices to protect their personnel and facilities and maintain their businesses and reputations in the face of unexpected tragedies. Crises that have served as catalysts have included Hurricane Andrew (1992), the Northridge

Earthquake (1994), the Exxon Valdez oil spill (1989), the Bhopal chemical release (1984), the World Trade Center attack of 1993, the Tylenol poisoning case (1982) and Y2K. A rich history of experiences has led to effective, workable strategies that have developed over time to allow private businesses in all areas of the economy to prevent, prepare for and respond to both weather-related and manmade catastrophes.

The phenomenon of modern terrorism, which unfortunately has evolved to wreak massive destruction and extensive loss of life rather than the more innocuous political symbolism of historic terrorism, now needs to be factored into the equation. Since 9/11 the United States has been fortunate - or some might say lucky - that terrorists have not yet carried out another major attack on United States soil. During the past several years, authorities have rounded up diverse groups of individuals who have allegedly sought to carry out terrorist acts in the United States. The majority of these individuals were amateurs who lacked the resources, knowledge and fire to launch extreme acts of terrorism that would target large numbers of Americans and inflict massive casualties. Certainly the highly trained, committed and prepared individuals who carried out the 9/11 attacks possessed the passion, determination and desire to effect a great deal of damage.

The Federal Government has dedicated extensive resources to the authorities tasked with this responsibility, and while the results have been commendable, one must acknowledge that some of this success has rested on pure, "dumb luck." Those employed in law enforcement and counterintelligence will always give some credit to simple luck for their accomplishments, especially since terrorism is currently raging rampant in Europe, Africa and Asia. However, recent developments suggest that American citizens can no longer deny the uncomfortable fact that United States soil remains extremely vulnerable to terrorists.

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A Few Facts About Terrorism

There are two kinds of terrorism: “discriminate terrorism,” in which all victims are potential enemies or combatants, and “indiscriminate terrorism,” in which the casual shopper, a planeload of travelers, or the visitor to a nightclub can be a victim. Six basic tactics comprise 95 percent of all terrorist attacks: bombings (which account for roughly half), assassinations, kidnappings, hostage situations, and hijackings.

Terrorism is not an act of mindless random violence; terrorist acts are committed with the intention of achieving one or more goals. Possible goals include attaining widespread notoriety while educating society about personal beliefs, obtaining official recognition from a government, broadening one’s power base, undermining a government’s power and morale, or causing a leader to overreact by launching counterproductive and provocative acts so that he or she will lose popularity among supporters or citizens. The Unabombers’s 18-year series of bombings is a good example of a terrorist attempting to achieve this last goal.

Although major terrorist organizations are typically led by mature and experienced individuals, many terrorists are young, often between the ages of 22 and 25. Eighty percent of terrorists are male and 75 to 80 percent are single. Terrorists are not to be mistaken for “guerrillas”; terrorists often come from upper-class families and generally are better educated than the average non-terrorist. A study of 172 al Qaeda terrorists found that roughly 90 percent came from relatively stable and secure backgrounds, three-quarters came from middle-class or upper-class families, and two-thirds had gone to college. A recent phenomenon that has complicated security ramifications is the advent of suicide bombers being used by groups connected to Islamic Fundamentalism. Again, research has revealed the surprising conclusion that suicide bombers reflect the same middle to upper-class characteristics mentioned above that apply to mainline terrorists.

A Brief History and Chronology

While terrorism has been in existence for millennia, stretching as far back as the 1st century A.D., it has evolved throughout time and has thus historically been difficult to define. Terrorism became established as a recognizable phenomenon in the 19th century as radical political theories led to the formation of small terrorist organizations that would attack nation-states, and as drastic improvements in weapons technology allowed for easier and more accessible methods of destruction. Some groups were not very well organized, such as the Anarchists who failed as a political movement, but still succeeded in assassinating heads of states of France, Italy, Russia, Spain and the United States.

The late 19th century also witnessed an increase in nationalism throughout the world, with states beginning to proclaim their national identity through conquering and oppression. Smaller groups of people now had to choose between assimilation in a larger nation-state or resistance; some examples of this problem in the twentieth and twenty-first century were and are the Irish, Serbs, Croatians, Armenians, Kurds, Chechens and the Basque.

While some historians claim that international terrorism “officially” began in 1970 with the September 6 simultaneous hijacking of TWA flight 74, Swissair flight 100 and PanAm flight 93, others point to the 1972 kidnapping and killing of Israeli athletes who were supposed to compete in the Munich Olympics by a Palestian group called, “Black September,” with the political goal of arranging for the release of Palestinian prisoners. By the mid-1980s, state-sponsored terrorism had made a comeback. Americans and other Western targets in the Middle East came under attack by countries such as Iran, Libya and Syria. Such state-sponsored terrorism remains a serious threat to date, although it has been overshadowed recently by the religiously-inspired terrorism of many modern-day terrorist groups, such as Hamas, Hezbollah, and, of course, al Qaeda, who led the 9/11 attacks.

While the missions carried out by al Qaeda on September 11, 2001 constituted the most devastating attacks of international terrorism ever experienced by the United States, it was not the first time that foreign extremists had targeted our nation. In fact, years earlier in 1993, the World Trade Center had been the target of Islamic fundamentalists who detonated a bomb in the building's parking structure.

Threats from within the United States are also very real. The deadliest act of domestic terrorism in the United States took place in 1995, when Timothy McVeigh, a U.S. citizen, bombed a Federal building in Oklahoma City, killing 168 people and injuring more than 500 others. Throughout the years there have been various plots of domestic terrorism across the nation by different groups and individuals, ranging from white supremacists to anti-government types, and from eco-terrorists to anti-abortionists. Since 1976, eco-terrorists, people who commit acts of violence, sabotage or property destruction out of concern for the environment or animals, have committed over 1,100 criminal acts and have damaged hundreds of millions of dollars worth of property. One such group is the Animal Liberation Front (ALF), which has become one of the more extreme groups in the United States, engaging in perpetual illegal activity, usually vandalism targeted at fur companies, mink farms, restaurants, and animal research laboratories. These domestic terrorist groups are normally small and focus on specific institutions to gain publicity for their cause. While it is correct to investigate and monitor the activities of these groups, the United States would be remiss if terrorists groups espousing radical Islamic Fundamentalism were not the primary focus of our concern, attention and dedicated resources.

Afghanistan and al Qaeda

Many point to Afghanistan as the genesis of today's larger problem of international terrorism. This extraordinary country possesses a violent and torturous history, and experts trace the Islamic militancy prevalent in the 21st century to a single event: the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in

December 1979. The Afghans reacted by waging a jihad (holy war). The Muslim World and the West rushed to the aid of the Afghans, supplying them with weapons, humanitarian aid and militant training. The jihad launched by the Mujahideen (holy warriors) developed a stern form of Islamic militancy that began to take on a life of its own. A sophisticated subculture of religious attitudes towards "the infidel" grew increasingly bitter and intolerant. After the defeat of the Russians, this subculture comprised a network of Islamic extremists promoting religious intolerance, and this robust militancy had to find a new infidel to defeat. Opportunities abounded from Kashmir to Cechynya and then moved towards the West and the United States because of Western support for some of the enemies of their movement.

A recent Congressional report concerning the September 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center revealed that between 40,000 and 100,000 terrorists from 56 countries worldwide were trained in Afghani terrorist camps to use explosives and initiate kidnappings and assaults. The FBI has suggested that only about 3000 of these individuals have been apprehended to date. Included in the list of terrorists at large are several of the top al Qaeda leaders, such as Osama bin Laden and his top deputies. To make matters worse, Pakistan - which shares a border with Afghanistan and happens to possess nuclear weapons - is in a state of political turmoil. While this nation is now under martial law, al Qaeda and the Taliban are again operating training camps within Afghanistan and Islamic militancy is growing.

Recent information surfacing in the press reflects the growing threat of this phenomenon in the West. The director of MI5 in the United Kingdom stated that there were more than 4000 Islamic militants predisposed to violence in the United Kingdom and more than 2000 were under active investigation. After a smattering of arrests in Italy, Germany and France, the pressing question across Europe is how many Europeans have passed through the training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan. A

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dangerous consequence is that for the most part citizens of the European Union do not need visas to enter the United States.

During 2007 there were numerous threats and warnings of an imminent terrorist attack against the United States. A well-publicized warning from the Secretary of Homeland Security indicated that al Qaeda was planning attacks against American cities. Surely the lack of an attack against the United States homeland has not been a deliberate, calculated decision by the core leadership of al Qaeda! Far too many attacks have been intercepted and neutralized for that to be the case. Many of those foiled and failed attacks, such as the 2006 foiled plot to destroy airliners enroute from London to the United States, the Library Tower plot, Richard Reid's failed attempt to take down an American airliner and Jose Padilla's subversive activities signal some connection to the core al Qaeda leadership and agenda. Although some experts suggest that al Qaeda's core may be temporarily damaged and no longer poses a strategic threat to the United States, tactical attacks against soft targets are certainly still in the reach of jihadist operatives.

Assessing the Risk

Twenty years ago, most public and private entities had hazard-specific response plans; however, these organizations eventually realized that an all-hazards approach was more comprehensive in assessing major disaster situations. Such an approach installs countermeasures to prevent the daily challenges of crime - pilfering, workplace violence, weather-related extremes and even pandemics, and puts an enterprise in an excellent position to protect both the personnel and the facilities from a conventional terrorist attack. The lack of successful major attacks against the homeland can engender a dangerous complacency that allows for vulnerabilities. This complacency could not only affect the private sector but also influence the allocation of

counterterrorism resources against those planning to damage America.

There are 24 million businesses in the United States, and each one of them is a potential target for a terrorist group or sympathizer. Protecting these businesses are almost one million law enforcement officers, translating into one law enforcement officer for every 30 businesses - and the vast majority of these officers are not directed at fighting terrorism, but ordinary street crime. Ultimately, the responsibility for security at each facility rests with the management of that site and the company as a whole.

During an October 2007 meeting of the National Strategy for Homeland Security President George W. Bush warned, "Today our nation is safer, but we are not yet safe." The President pointed out that although our enemies have not succeeded in launching another attack on our soil for over six years, there are many threats we still face: pandemic diseases, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and natural disasters. Therefore, we must develop a culture of preparedness at every level from the private sector to a multinational effort and cooperation. Since 85% of America's critical infrastructure is in the hands of the private sector, it is imperative that the private sector supports the strategic efforts of the Federal authorities while diligently providing for the safety and security of its personnel and facilities. This will eliminate vulnerabilities and ensure for the overall security of the American infrastructure and economy. The time for urgency is now.®



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