

Are we Prepared?

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We are more prepared today to deal with a terrorist attack both domestic and transnational than we were prior to the attack on September 11, 2001. I think most would agree that that is the case but to understand how we got to that point we have to understand the historical background of terrorism notwithstanding domestic issues and natural disasters. Terrorism is defined in many ways but in simple terms it is the use of terror as a means of coercion. Why would mankind harass, injure or kill for an ideology? That's a difficult question that historians, analysts and government agents have been struggling with for centuries. To take a look at how terrorism evolved in America prior to 9/11 I'll start with one that has religious significance.

In 1838 The Missouri Militia killed 18 Mormon men, women and children in what became known as the Haun's Hill Massacre. Religious ideologies have led to conflict since recorded history. Without getting into a world history lesson we don't have to look much farther than the Crusades or the Holocaust for proof. Another U.S. historical example could be the assassination of President James Garfield in 1881 by a religious fanatic. It could be inferred that religion was the predominant root of conflict leading to acts of terrorism but there are many others.

A labor rally in Chicago in 1886 saw a bomb explode in the Haymarket Square causing a riot and the subsequent deaths of 12 people. As we continue thru our history we will see many examples of varying reason and magnitude such as the assassination of another U.S. President, William McKinley, in 1901 by an anarchist or the Wall Street Bombing that killed 38 people and wounded about 400. The Wall Street bombing was executed

using a horse drawn carriage filled with explosives. In addition to the sad loss of life is that this mystery remains unsolved, no credible source of responsibility and no named perpetrator (s). As we turn into the 20th century we see a shift of technologies and vulnerabilities. In 1933 a Boeing 247 was blown up mid-flight by a nitroglycerin bomb killing all 7 onboard. This was the first proven case of air sabotage in the history of aviation.

We also had individuals and/or groups that would protest or initiate a terrorist act for personal interests or conflicts. The “Mad Bomber” who terrorized New York City for nearly twenty years was protesting the local electric utility company. He placed over 30 bombs in public areas to include Grand Central Station as well as sent out multiple threatening letters. So we have an example of terrorism without religious or political consequence.

Throughout the 20th century our history was peppered with acts of racism, bigotry and intolerance for progression of human rights. A member of the KKK killed 4 young girls by blowing up a church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1963. This intolerable act became known as the 16th Street Baptist Church Bombing. The NAACP leader was also killed by a firebomb initiated by the KKK in 1966. There were many organizations that acted out with protests and acts of terrorism to include the Black Liberation Front, the Black Panthers and of course the KKK. In 1965 the Black Liberation Front masterminded a plot to blow up three of our most prestigious national monuments; the statue of liberty, the liberty bell and the Washington monument. They were to use dynamite to

accomplish this task but fortunately for us and our children NYPD interceded and stopped it so we can cherish these monuments today. With the conclusion of our World Wars, Korea and Vietnam now coming to a close we saw a rise in terrorism.

In 1974 we saw two events of relevance to 9/11. They were the bombing of TWA Flight 841 and the bombing incident at Laguardia National Airport. A bomb on Flight 841 killed 88 passengers and responsibility was claimed by extremist, Abu Nidaz and his terrorist organizations. The bombing at Laguardia killed 11 and injured 75 and no one claimed responsibility. These were glaring cues that our aviation industry is highly vulnerable. To date no arrests have been made in the Laguardia bombing. Another key factor is the introduction of Islamist terrorists and activities. This was again evident in 1977 when a Muslim terrorist group, African American Hanafi Sect, seized three buildings in Washington D.C. and held over 100 hostages. The Islamic extremists are bringing terrorism to our soil.

The 1980s saw various terrorist attacks directed at U.S. personnel and interests overseas. The Iran Hostage Crisis started in 1979 and carried over for 444 days ending in 1981. This act was carried out by an Iranian Muslim extremist who took over the U.S. Embassy taking 52 Diplomatic hostages. This incident has been scrutinized scrupulously as how could the mighty U.S. allow there embassy to be held for that long. In April of 1983 terrorists bombed our embassy in Beirut, Lebanon killing 63 people to include 18 Americans. This would not be the last terrorist act carried out in Lebanon as most of us are aware. In October a truck filled with explosives drove into the Marine barracks

killing 241 service members and injuring over 80. It was evident that someone was not happy with our International policy or actions at that time.

While reviewing the terrorist historical outline I noticed a glaring example of biological terrorism. In 1984 the Rajneesh Cult spread salmonella in open salad bars in multiple restaurants in Oregon. An estimated 750 people became ill while over 40 were hospitalized. How do we prevent this from occurring today?

Before jumping into the 1990s there was another significant terrorist attack that again showed extreme vulnerability on behalf of aviation. In 1988 Pan Am flight 103 blew up over Scotland while enroute to the US. 270 people were killed to include 169 Americans, among which 41 were students. This act was claimed by a Libyan terrorist.

Now a prelude to 9/11 came in 1993 in the form of the World Trade Center Bombing. An Islamic Coalition consisting of 5 terrorist groups attempted to blow up the World Trade Center. They didn't succeed in doing so, however, they did leave 6 dead and injured close to 1000 civilians. The magnitude of 5 terrorist groups working together to strike U.S. soil was enormous. Terrorist groups do not traditionally work together so this will evidence that their cause is broad and there will be more to follow. Before touching on the most prolific event prior to 9/11 I would like to give a couple more examples of terrorist acts directed at the U.S. The Khobar Tower bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996 saw 19 U.S. service members killed as Al Qaeda detonated a fuel truck. We also had another tactic used against a U.S. Navy ship in Yemen where 17 sailors were killed. A

small boat containing explosives and operated by Al Qaeda operatives drove directly into the ship. This tactic demonstrated yet more vulnerability; waterways, commercial and military vessels.

The most prolific event pre 9/11 and yet another example of international terrorism and the rise of Al Qaeda was the simultaneous bombings of the U.S. Embassies in the East African capitol cities of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya. These attacks killed over 200 and injured over 4000. It was a well organized plan masterminded by Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri. Before I move to post 9/11 attacks I have to touch on act of domestic terrorism that occurred in 1995.

The Oklahoma City Bombing at the Murrah Federal Building which killed 168 people including 19 children and injured close to 800. This terrorist act although not predicated on religion was expected to bring about change through retaliation against the government. McVeigh was a delusional conspiracy theorist that wanted retaliation against the U.S. government for the Waco, Texas stand-off among others. McVeigh was able to manufacture a bomb comprised of primarily fertilizer (ammonium nitrate) and race fuel. He was able to ignite the compound with blasting caps stolen from a quarry. This horrific act makes it clear that we are vulnerable on many fronts and that materials for these types of acts are readily accessible.

Post 9/11 has seen relatively few terrorist attacks directed against U.S. civilians and/or on American soil, however, our military in both Afghanistan and Iraq have seen a steady

stream of attacks. The attacks on 9/11 saw 19 hijackers clear security screening checkpoints, board aircrafts and take them over. The defense of our airspace was compromised as the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and the North American Aerospace Defense command (NORAD) fumbled to communicate and react effectively. There were failings at all levels of government and all measures enacted after the Embassy bombings and the U.S. Cole did virtually nothing to alter or slow down this attack. Terrorism was not considered a major concern pre-9/11 so we observed a major shift in policy. Now that we have reached 9/11 are we now more prepared to deal with these escalating attacks?

The structure of our government has changed to encompass the terrorist threat. In 1995 we had the foundation for our current policy in that our three objectives were to reduce vulnerability, deter terrorism and respond rapidly and decisively. The lead agencies for combating terrorism pre-9/11 were the Department of State (DoS) and the Department of Justice (DoJ). The Homeland Security Act of 2002 established the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This Act would bring together 22 federal agencies under a single executive department and dissolve the convoluted chain of communication that existed prior. We would now have a clear strategy for combating terrorism that is broken down into critical mission areas; Intelligence and Warning, Border and Transportation Security, Domestic Counterterrorism, Protecting Critical Infrastructure, Defending against catastrophic Terrorism, and Emergency Preparedness and Response. The inception of DHS steered us in the right directions and has sprouted response strategies and standards such as the National Incident Management System (NIMS) and Incident

Command Structure (ICS). NIMS provides us with a uniform set of processes, protocols, and procedures that all emergency responders, at every level of government, will use to conduct emergency response. NIMS ensures that those involved in emergency response understand their roles and have the tools they need to be effective.

The DHS is organized into 5 directorates to accomplish its mission. These directorates are: Information Analysis and Infrastructure Protection, Border and Transportation Security, Emergency Preparedness and Response, Science and Technology, and Management. Within the Department there are also other critical agencies used in the effort of combating terrorism; The U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, the Office of Inspector General, and the Office of State and Local Coordination. 9/11 caused this dramatic organizational and policy change that would bring our troops to the threat and our government and citizens to a position of awareness and insecurity.

There are many things we can do as citizens to make this country safer and continue in our traditions of liberty and freedoms. General awareness and individual responsibilities can go a long way. Future preparedness is based on efficient allocation of money and better coordinated response (Skor). Our nation has demonstrated through legislation, training exercises and real world application that we have much improved coordination and duplication of efforts lending it to minimal or no exploitable voids. Terrorism both domestic and transnational can be deterred and/or acted upon through effective policing (national and international), public awareness and conscientious legislation.

To conclude, in response to our great forefather Benjamin Franklin, we are safer but we are walking a fine line when it comes to infringement on civil liberties. The US Patriot Act is an astounding example of this infringement, however with that being said, we are far safer then pre 9/11. So in keeping with Benjamin Franklin's famous quote, "Any society that would give up a little liberty to gain a little security will deserve neither and lose both" I say we have given up little liberty but have gained significant security.

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