



Incorporating antiterrorism to your security posture: It is not for everybody - by Doug Haines

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The recent attack in Manchester brings to light a harsh reality – terrorism is an effective tool for those who use it. It is not going away and it will probably get worse before it gets better. Immediately after the bombing, several counterterrorism experts were hosted by the cable news networks. They professed, “Of course, it happened in Europe. What did you expect? Immigrants, even those second and third generations, are still being marginalized. They’re usually disenfranchised, have low skill jobs if any, drop out of school, are involved in petty crimes and live essentially in ‘cultural ghettos.’ But it can’t happen here because immigrants in the U.S. are well integrated into American society.” The truth is, while, there’s a greater integration in this country the fact remains, we’re not where we need to be. Not by a long shot!

A lot of experts have come forward with their analysis of what else could have been done differently. There’s been and will continue to be a lot of “arm-chair quarterbacking.” Admittedly, we need to learn from our mistakes but more importantly we need to adjust what we’re doing and look forward to dealing with emerging threats.

But, instead of focusing on what happened and how to “harden” public ventures, I want to spend this time on what architects, engineers, facility managers, planners and security professionals can do now to actually make a difference for events that are certainly coming later. The collective response we provide to an “intentional act” (I hate to call them terrorist acts because on some level that legitimizes their cause and I don’t believe we should do that. After all, this “scumbag” wanted to and succeeding in killing kids.) must be holistic. What we do in response will fall into one of two categories; counterterrorism or antiterrorism.

Counterterrorism & Antiterrorism

Counterterrorism (Think: The killing of Osama Bin Laden) is the active pursuit of these murderers, their organizations, their financing, recruitment, etc. Let’s leave this piece of the threat puzzle to those best resourced to handle it; i.e., the military, intelligence agencies and police departments.

Antiterrorism is more passive (Think: How the World Trade Center building design functioned on 9/11). It involves strategies that are inert and almost unnoticeable to everyone except the well-trained eye.

The basic assumption in antiterrorism is there are too many threats to defend against, so the focus is on reducing their effects. The second basic assumption is that measures must be in place beforehand. And lastly, the resources are not available to harden every facility, transportation system or event venue to the point that nothing will occur. In antiterrorism the overarching philosophy is to prevent mass casualties.

CPTED & Antiterrorism Strategies

We can reduce the occurrence of criminal activity by implementing Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles; i.e., natural surveillance, natural access control, territorial reinforcement and maintenance/up-keep.

Another set of strategies can be used to reduce the effects of an “intentional act” should one occur. These principles fall into five general categories; maximize stand-off distances from vehicle or person borne explosive devices; prevent progressive collapse of buildings higher than three stories, limit airborne contamination by keeping good air in and bad air out or vice versa and provide mass notification by telling people what you want them to do.

Implementation Parameters or “Triggers”

To do this, we will need to establish “triggers” or parameters for implementation. I believe these “triggers” could be initiated for all new construction with an implementation date as soon as we can pass ordinances requiring this new approach. For existing buildings, implement these new standards during major construction projects when the project costs exceed 50% or more of the plant value cost of the building, or when changing the floor space by 50% or more, or when changing the usage of the structure from uninhabited space to high occupancy space.

Additionally, not all spaces should incorporate antiterrorism standards. We should concentrate our efforts on high occupancy spaces (> 50 people) and not worry about uninhabited or low occupancy spaces (< 10 people). Why 50? In emergency management we describe a mass casualty event as “one more than you’re capable of handling.” Fifty casualties will easily overwhelm just about any first responder unit or emergency service center.

We can defeat them, but it’s got to be a collaborative effort that includes both, active and passive measures.

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