

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**Learning from Tragedy:
Why American Law Enforcement Should be Prepared to
Counter a Mumbai-style Attack Within the United States**

**A Leadership White Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**

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May 2015**

ABSTRACT

For many American police agencies, preparing and training officers to respond to an active killer, or “active shooter”, incident has become an established, accepted practice, rapidly becoming an industry standard for law enforcement. This training focuses on aggressively seeking out, engaging, and stopping the shooter, or shooters, from inflicting further harm on innocents. Recent attacks in foreign countries, such as the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India in November 2008, have involved multiple teams of dedicated, trained terrorist fighters. As a result, American law enforcement agencies should be prepared to effectively respond to these large scale, infantry-style “swarm” attacks.

Coordinated terrorist attacks involving multiple killer teams and infantry-style, small unit tactics have proven very successful when employed in large, urban population centers. Their successful use in foreign cities, combined with the numerous coastal “soft” targets in the United States and a current lack of national law enforcement preparation and training to meet this threat, underscore the need for American police agencies to plan for this type of event. Critics will point out that this could result in the over-militarization of American law enforcement; however, the tactics and training utilized would only be implemented in the event of a worst-case, swarm-style terrorist attack. Another concern would be the cost of training and equipment, which is largely negated by using existing patrol rifles and instructors that, once trained, can return to their agencies and train first responders in these critical skills.

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INTRODUCTION

Many police department administrators have recognized the need for their officers to prepare for and respond to active shooter incidents. This preparation has included specific training for officers with first responder responsibilities, implementation of departmental policy and procedure concerning active shooter response, acquiring or allowing the use of specialized equipment and weapons, and mutual-aid or inter-agency agreements to share resources and support in the event of an active shooter incident. In recent years, however, a new type of active shooter threat has emerged: multiple teams of shooters conducting “swarm” assaults, involving the use of infantry-style small unit tactics in urban population centers. In light of their recent effective use in foreign countries, US law enforcement agencies should consider how they will effectively train and prepare to successfully counter these types of assaults, even though they have not yet occurred within the United States on a large scale.

In late November of 2008, ten terrorists entered the city of Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India, using water-born infiltration and immediately executed a plan that had been well planned, rehearsed, and for which they had received specific training. Over a 62 hour period, these ten terrorists killed at least 173 people and injured another 308, devastating the city and its financial center (Livingstone, 2009). The attackers split up into teams (one four-man team and three, two-man teams) and used small-unit, infantry-style tactics to assault predetermined locations, including two major Indian hotels: the Trident Oberoi and Taj Mahal Palace and Tower.

The initial Indian police response to the attacks was very ineffective. There were numerous reports of Indian police failing to engage the terrorists, and several instances

of where they were seen running away from the fight. Special antiterrorism response units were hours and hundreds of miles away from Mumbai and, because of the burdensome process in place to request assistance, their mobilization was delayed for hours. For the first 9 hours after the attacks were initiated, the only offensive capability rested with the local police force, which was poorly equipped and inadequately trained (Felling, 2010).

Although the United States boasts a generally well-trained and equipped domestic police force, it will still be up to first responding officers to track down and engage the terrorist killer teams, using similar small-unit tactics and movements. Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) teams will be quickly overwhelmed in the event of a coordinated, multiple killer team terrorist attack. A coordinated US Military response will take at least 24 hours to become fully mobilized, leaving local law enforcement with the responsibility of “taking the fight to the enemy.” American law enforcement agencies should be prepared to effectively respond to large scale, infantry-style “swarm” attacks. Successful response to these threats will require law enforcement administrators, trainers, emergency planners, and even the first responders themselves, to think “outside the box” of traditional police tactics and mindset.

POSITION

The use of swarm-type, infantry-style tactics in terrorist attacks have proven to be devastatingly effective. In addition to the attacks in Mumbai, India, multiple killer team attacks took place in 2008 on government buildings in Kabul, Afghanistan; on the Sri Lankan Cricket Team in Lahore, Pakistan; and on the Manawan Police Academy in

Lahore, Pakistan (Felling, 2010). These attacks, and the large scale incident in Mumbai specifically, have shown that relatively simple tactics and equipment, combined with sophisticated pre-planning, intelligence, training, and execution can be tremendously effective at causing wide-spread panic, terror, and economic disaster (Trindal, 2009).

Terrorists have also learned that using readily available technology can enhance their operational efficiency. In the case of Mumbai, ten terrorists infiltrated their target using a maritime approach after hijacking an Indian fishing trawler, killing the entire crew, and then using rigid-hulled inflatable boats (similar to those used by US special operations forces) to make an amphibious landing (Felling, 2010). They then split up into teams: one team of four, and three teams of two. Using pre-programmed handheld GPS units, the teams were able to navigate through the city to their targets quickly and efficiently, on foot and in taxis and stolen vehicles (Trindal, 2009).

Using a mix of small arms (Chinese AK-56 automatic weapons and 9mm semiautomatic handguns), improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and grenades, combined with multiple simultaneous attacks and movement from one objective to the other, the terrorists were able to give the appearance that the Indians were under attack by a much larger force (Felling 2010). They were able to keep in constant communication with their command personnel in Pakistan and each other using voice-over-IP (VOIP) technology and Blackberry phones. Using low-tech weapons; well-trained, organized, and committed attackers; and readily available communications and GPS technologies, a series of prolonged, multiple-location, multiple-cell terrorist attacks was able to be successfully carried out, enabling ten attackers to successfully terrorize a city of 20 million people, grinding it to a halt for several days.

In order for American law enforcement to be effective in responding to a Mumbai-style attack, police administrators and agencies must address training and policy issues when it comes to use of force and tactical response. Traditional training and tactics, even those that are taught for most active shooter situations, simply will not be effective against a multi-cell attack using infantry-style tactics. Patrol officers will need to be trained to react to these threats “in a rapid, efficient, and surgical manner (Howe, 2007, p. 1)”. Even before the attack in Mumbai, some police trainers had been calling for police administrators, trainers, and officers to consider how well prepared they are to meet the threats they could face. Chudwin (2007) encouraged officers and trainers to take an open-minded, objective look at their training, asking them, “Are you training to defeat a teenager with a gun, or a group of dedicated attackers?” (para. 6).

Given the extremely violent and highly dynamic nature of these types of attacks, authorized rules of engagement (ROE) should also be examined and tested against a multi-cell terrorist attack scenario. Officers will need to be trained and confident in their abilities to quickly move to the threat area, and aggressively pursue those that are committing the violence. They should have training in how to conduct “fire and maneuver” operations, and know when to apply it in order to cover open ground that lacks adequate cover (Howe, n.d.) or to push through to the threat area.

Examining some of the reasons why Mumbai was chosen for the attack can provide valuable insight as to the potential target areas a terrorist group might select within the United States. According to Rabasa et al. (2009), Mumbai’s status as an economic, cultural, and national symbol of modern India made it a very desirable target. Foreign tourists virtually guaranteed international news coverage and ensured that the

actions of ten attackers would be felt around the world. There are many targets of equal opportunity within the United States. Major cities such as New York, New Orleans, and Los Angeles have many miles of waterfront area that are susceptible to maritime infiltration tactics. They contain very dense urban populations and have famous historic, cultural, and uniquely American landmarks that would be very tempting to a terrorist organization thinking about conducting an assault on United States soil. Large attendance sporting events, universities and other institutions of higher education, national landmarks, and schools are all at risk of being targeted.

COUNTER POSITION

Perhaps the greatest fear that some have for incorporating this type of response training is the over-militarization of American police forces. There is a general concern that rules of engagement are written by the law enforcement community, and there is “no serious oversight of police behavior” (Greenhut, 2008, p. 16). Americans place a premium on personal freedoms and liberty, and many citizens fear that the United States will become a police state filled with civilian law enforcement armed with military weapons, equipment, and training. Radley Balko, in his interview with Motherboard, stated that although “gear and weapons and tanks are a problem . . . a much deeper problem is the effect all of this war talk and battle rhetoric has had on policing as a profession” (Arria, 2013).

Unfortunately, preparing a local police force to respond to a paramilitary, coordinated terrorist attack using small-unit, military style tactics, requires the use of modern battle weapons, tactics, and mindset. Anything less runs the substantial risk of prolonging the killing of innocent civilians and placing first responders in greater danger

as they confront the threat. In the case of Mumbai, Indian police were unable to effectively respond to the swift-moving, heavily-armed terrorist teams, prolonging the operational window in which the attackers could conduct their mission objectives. In the United States, “Most American law enforcement agencies have no experience in dealing with multiple teams of militarily trained offenders armed with automatic weapons, hand grenades, and homemade bombs” (Monahan & Stainbrook, 2011, p. 26). Although some factions of the American public may decry what they perceive as the militarization of police forces, modern military tactics, training, and equipment would save many lives, both civilian and first responder, in the event of a coordinated terrorist attack. Since these attacks have been widely studied by law enforcement agencies and governments across the world, the American public will not accept any excuse, after the fact, for local first responders to not be trained, equipped, and prepared to mitigate civilian casualties.

Another concern is the perceived cost of the specialized weapons and tactics training that would enable first responders to be prepared to successfully engage a militarily trained attacker or teams of attackers. Many police departments are currently facing significant budget cuts, and training budgets are among the first to be affected. Even though some police departments have purchased new firearms within the past ten years and implemented new, updated active-shooter response training, they are still pressured by officers and the public to reevaluate their current equipment and training programs (Ashley & Golles, 2000). A rifle suitable for law enforcement use in a multiple attacker, terrorist scenario would need to be semi-automatic, magazine fed, and capable of firing a full-sized round (as opposed to a carbine that fires handgun

ammunition) capable of defeating soft body armor. These arms generally cost several hundreds of dollars by themselves, and can easily exceed one thousand dollars, depending on optics, flashlights, cases, and other accessories. Multiply this cost per officer (a rifle is most effective if sighted in and issued to a single officer), and many law enforcement budgets can quickly become overwhelmed. Rifle-proof ceramic plates, which can protect first responders from the rifle caliber weapons that attacking terrorists would use, also cost several hundreds of dollars per officer.

To offset these costs, many police departments have initiated some form of “officer rifle purchase program,” in which the department will purchase and provide a rifle to an officer, and, in exchange, the officer will have a portion of the rifle’s cost deducted from their pay until the cost of the rifle is completely reimbursed to the department. The rifle is then the personal property of the officer and in use on patrol. Departments can also send their use of force instructors to specialized schools, teaching them to develop training courses that will enable them to return to their home departments and teach first responders more advanced infantry-style small unit tactics. Many of these tactics and movements can be rehearsed, over and over again, without the need for live ammunition or specialized facilities. Department policy is also very inexpensive to develop; it requires only the man-hours needed to research current best-industry practices. Mutual aid agreements between departments, pre-planning resource acquisition, and multi-agency interoperability table-top exercises are all very effective, low cost administrative level preparations that can be made before an actual attack occurs. Simply ignoring the threat, or taking a calculated risk that the attack “won’t happen here” and refusing to make preparations because of the cost, will not be

acceptable to the American public when all is said and done (Ashley & Golles, 2000). Having been made aware of the threat, law enforcement executives and leadership will be expected to prepare to meet, and defeat, the threats that they knew were a possibility, no matter how low the probability of their occurrence might have been.

RECOMMENDATION

The citizens of the United States face a very real threat, one that should not be underestimated or ignored. Over the past several decades, terrorist acts have become increasingly organized, complex, and effective. Typically, terrorist acts that are perpetrated outside the borders of the United States are developed, tested, implemented, and refined before they are imported into this country (Yadin, 2006). Vehicle borne improvised explosive devices and aircraft hijackings are two examples of terroristic acts that were developed overseas and then implemented domestically. Terrorist attacks consisting of multiple killer-teams using small unit, infantry-style tactics in large urban areas will be no different. Their successful use outside the United States sets the stage for their future implementation on American soil, making it critically important that law enforcement agencies be prepared to respond to these large scale, infantry-style attacks quickly, effectively, and aggressively.

A successful police response will require American police agencies to train their first responding officers in small-unit, infantry style tactics that will provide them with a tactical advantage. Law enforcement agencies should also examine their policies and procedures concerning the rules of engagement and use of force, taking into account the terrorists' methods and ultimate goal: to create as much death, destruction, and shock as possible before being intercepted and stopped. Local law enforcement's

response time and tactical proficiency is the key to the terrorist's success or failure. A swift, aggressive, and tactically sound response will cut short their intended plans and reduce civilian casualties. A slow, indecisive, and ill prepared and equipped police response will result in much higher civilian and first responder loss of life.

The United States is a target rich environment, with many coastal urban centers, high attendance sporting venues, and soft targets such as primary and secondary schools and universities. America is also a symbol of western thought, ideals, and way of life, making it a target of religious fundamentalists who believe that western society is corrupt, evil, and immoral. They see no distinction between a soldier on a battlefield and an innocent child or noncombatant. As a result, those fundamentalists will target any and all civilians, no matter how young, old, or helpless.

There are some that will argue against preparing for this type of onslaught, believing that the likelihood of such an attack is so low that harm from the "over militarization" of local police would far outweigh any possible benefit. This is also the same segment of society that would condemn the police for an inadequate response, holding law enforcement executives and leaders responsible for not preparing for a threat that they knew to exist. Careful policy considerations and proper training should assuage some of those concerns. This type of training would only be applied in the most severe circumstances in which an overwhelming, deadly threat was taking civilian lives and endangering the American public.

Another criticism is the cost to taxpayers of training and equipping America's first responders. Weapons, armor, and tactics training will stretch thin the already reduced training funds of many police departments who have been forced to endure budget cuts.

This expense, however, is not as great as many might think. Patrol rifle purchase programs, in which police officers can purchase a personally owned rifle by having funds automatically deducted from their pay, can equip first responders with long arms enabling them to engage attackers at an extended range and giving them the capability of defeating the soft body armor that many offenders, terrorists and otherwise, have been known to use. Small-unit tactics training can be taught to qualified, experienced instructors, who in turn can pass those skills on to first responders. Police agencies have been using this technique for many years, training a small cadre of instructors in a skill or technique, and then bringing that knowledge back to their home agencies.

Implementation of these concepts in a law enforcement agency starts with an assessment of the agency's current capabilities, needs, and personnel. Once these assessments have been obtained, proper steps can be taken to establish interagency operability, mutual aid agreements, training programs, and required equipment. Support for these initiatives will need to start at the administrative and leadership levels of the police agencies, with the support of community leaders and legislators.

Through the years, American law enforcement has evolved to meet the changing needs of society and the emergent criminal threat. This newest threat of coordinated terrorist attacks is no different. American law enforcement must realize that they play a crucial role in the security of the United States. Failing to adequately prepare for attacks such as these will cost many more American lives, civilian and first responder, than is necessary. Conventional SWAT training and tactics, more suitable for use in situations such as barricaded suspects and high risk warrant service, are not going to be effective against multiple, dedicated, heavily armed terrorist fighters, and street

officers are going to find themselves an essential part of a new specialized response unit in which they will be the first to intervene (Frazzano, 2010). Now is the time for local law enforcement to learn, prepare, and equip their officers to serve in their latest role: America's first line of defense against a brutal, violent enemy that knows no borders.

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