

**'POLICE EXPECT MUMBAI-STYLE
ATTACK ON CITY'
SUNDAY TIMES 20TH DEC 2009**

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David Rubens Associates is a specialist corporate security consultancy offering strategic security services to individuals and organisations across the world.

DRA has worked with government agencies, NGO's, international conglomerates and major global events, and brings a mixture of strategic vision, operational experience and academic research to all of its projects, however large or small.

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'Police expect Mumbai-style attack on city' Sunday Times, 20th December, 2009



This week's Sunday Times (20/12/09) ran a front-page story reporting senior SO15 (Counter Terrorism Command) authorities as claiming that they have serious intelligence concerning the possibility of a 'Mumbai-style' attack in London in the near future. The warning was made two weeks prior to the report, in what is a series of regular briefings given through security forums that act as the inter-face between the security services and local councils, companies and emergency services. The report stated that the police specialist anti-terrorist command believes that there is a terrorist cell active in London that has both the capability and intention to carry out a hostage-style attack using both small arms and IED's (improvised explosive devices). A 'senior security adviser' was quoted as saying 'Before, there has been speculation. Now we're getting what appears to be a definite plot to carry out a firearms attack on London'.

This special report look as the background behind the story, and assesses both the capabilities of potential attack groups and the likelihood of London being chosen as a target. The report concludes with a review of how how companies in London, and the rest of the UK, can ensure that their Crisis Management and Business Continuity plans can minimise the impact that any such attack might have.

Current Environment

London has been identified as an 'iconic ' target since the days immediately following the 9/11 attacks against America in 2001 and, together with Madrid, London is so far the only major European city to have been successfully targeted for a large-scale attack by Islamic terrorists.

The UK government is currently holding a high-profile enquiry into the background to the 2001 invasion of Iraq, in which the UK played a major role, as well as an enquiry into allegations that UK government and security forces were actively involved in the use of torture against (Moslem) UK citizens being held by US authorities.

The UK government is also involved in a disagreement with Pakistan's government over the role that Pakistani-connected youth are playing in terrorist activities targeted against UK citizens. This has led to a number of recent high-profile announcements from both sides that have led to an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust between the two governments.

We are also in the run-up to the 2012 Olympic Games, a fact that will ensure that any attack on London will gain even wider coverage than normal, and which will bring into doubt the ability of the government and local authorities to guarantee a safe Games, free from terrorist attack. It may have been a coincidence, but the 7/7/2005 attack happened as London was still celebrating the announcement made the previous day that London had been chosen to host the 2012 Games, and that will be a constant worry to police and security leaders in the coming two and a half years.

History

Although the 9/11 attacks introduced a new age of international terrorism, by then London had already been the target of terrorist attacks by the IRA (Irish Republican Army) for over thirty years. The IRA saw the British government in Northern Ireland as a foreign power, and from the late 1960's declared war on what they saw as an occupying (and oppressive) force. Although they originally targeted military targets in Northern Ireland, they soon shifted their tactics to focus on civilian targets in the UK mainland. In the first half of the 1990's they increased both the rate and the scale of their attacks, creating large-scale death, damage and disruption in the City of London, Docklands, and Heathrow airport. (In the twelve months between April 1992 and April 1993, there were over forty separate bombing incidents in London alone). In 2006, the Metropolitan Police Force created a specialist Counter-Terrorism Command (SO15), that was not only responsible for the prevention and policing of terrorist incidents, but also acted together with other agencies to create a unified and coordinated multi-agency terrorism response capability. It is for this reason that UK has probably the most sophisticated and experienced counter-terrorist capability in the world.

Present Threat from Al Qaeda

There has been a wide debate concerning the present capability of AQ, but the general consensus is that the main leadership of the organisation is isolated in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region, and there is no longer a centralised global AQ organisation such as existed at the time of the 9/11 attacks. We are now in what has been called Stage 5 development of AQ, when 'clean skins' or 'grassroot jihadis' who have not been identified by the security forces and are not coming up on their radar, are acting as independent cells in order to deliver their attacks without drawing attention from the security and intelligence agencies.

The defining characteristic of the UK Islamic extremist threat, and what differentiates it from other similar threats in the rest of Europe, is that rather than being based within the North African community (Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian, etc) as is the case in Europe, UK-based Islamic extremists are much more likely to emerge from within the Pakistani community that has been present in the UK since the 1970's and is now into second and third-generation development.

Whereas North African Islamism has been integrated into a wider secular society, Pakistani-based Islamism has tended to maintain its roots around *madrassa's*, religious schools that isolate their students from outside influences and are highly effective at creating an atmosphere of radicalisation. Whilst it is true that the Pakistani-related terrorists that have been involved in the two major London attacks, on 7/7 and 7/21/2005 were not religious in their behaviour or life-style, there is a perception amongst the authorities (and the media) that the *madrassa's* create an environment where radicalisation will find both fertile ground and willing recruits.



Security Response

The response of the government to the threat of Islamic extremism has consisted of two main lines of attack: firstly, to create the perception that the UK is under a genuine and serious threat of large-scale attacks, and secondly a series of high-profile arrests that often lead to a quiet admission some time later that either there was no threat in the first place, or any plan that was disrupted was so early in its development that there was never any actual threat to public security.

Eliza Manningham-Buller, then head of MI6, used a 2006 public speech to announce that there were '2000 jihadists in 200 groups involved in thirty terrorist plots', and that whilst present AQ groups were so unsophisticated that they were using simple home-made improvised explosive devices, 'tomorrows threats may include the use of chemicals, bacteriological agents, radioactive materials and even nuclear technology'.

High-profile UK police operations have included the Ricin Plot, Old Trafford terrorist plot and the recent arrest of nine Pakistani students accused of being linked with Al Qaeda, all of whom were subsequently released without charge. All of these operations have led to subsequent acceptance by the police that actually the people involved had no connection with terrorism, and the arrests were based on rumour rather than hard evidence.

The Present Threat

Whilst there is clearly an ever-present possibility that AQ (or a similar organisation) may target the UK for a a high-profile, mass-casualty attack, there are a number of factors limiting the likelihood of any such project either being successful, or if it is successfully delivered, of being of a scale that could have a significant impact on the continued daily operations of London or the UK.

The fact is that all of the four serious attempted terrorist attacks carried out in the UK since 2001 have been planned, managed and delivered by low-level, low-skilled amateurs, operating largely away from any major terrorist funding, support or leadership. There is a good reason for this. As soon as any terrorist cell moves beyond its simplest form - a group of three or four close-knit friends who are operating below the radar of any intelligence-gathering agency - they have to face the problems of managing secure communications,

meetings, transfer of funds, coordination and all of the other myriad activities that are almost certain to trigger a warning somewhere in the security apparatus. Given the huge amount of manpower and other resources that has been thrown at the 'terrorist problem', it is highly unlikely that any plan involving the coordination of more than the simplest of groups would be able to be brought to fruition without being discovered. It is actually a feature of many arrests that the the first police announcements make it clear that 'The suspect group was under surveillance for a number of months before the arrests were made'.

Current Security Status

The current terrorism threat level system was introduced in August 2006, (when the national situation was classified as 'Severe - an attack is highly likely', the second highest of the five classifications). Since then, it has yo-yoed between that and the highest classification of Critical ('An attack is expected imminently') until being down-graded to Level 3 ('Substantial - an attack is a strong possibility') on 29th July 2009, the lowest classification since the system was introduced. At the time of writing, the MI5 and Home Office websites had not reflected any change in the official classification, though it will be interesting to see if that is changed in light of the current information.

Business Continuity Management Planning

From the perspective of BCM planning, an announcement like this is an excellent opportunity to review existing BCM plans, and to bring together all stake-holders in the plan to review what programmes are in place. It should be remembered that such BCM planning is necessary not only to respond speedily and effectively to any disruption that an actual terrorist incident might cause, but also to any disruption that might be caused by an increase in preventative security measures within the City of London or the general working environment.

It is well recognised that one of the main factors in the effective implementation of any crisis management programme is the extent to which the major decision-makers in each department have had the chance to get to know each other and work together, for example through table-top exercises. The fact that the person at the other end of the phone is already known to you can make the moment-to-moment assessments and adaptations that will inevitably have to be made in the event that an actual crisis response programme is triggered, that much easier.

One of the lessons learned by the London-wide multi-agency Crisis Management team is that they have taken every opportunity to put their reponse programmes into position, even when not needed, so as to give themselves the opportunity to practice their own responses, and their integrated coordination with other teams and agencies. It was that foresight that allowed them to act so effectively when an actual incident occurred on 7/7/2005.

The organisations that use the disclosure of this report to check and up-date their own BCM plans will be precisely those organisations that will be best placed to emerge from any actual crisis situation with the greatest likelihood of survival.



Useful Links

MI5 Threat Levels

<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/output/what-are-threat-levels.html>

Government advice on Business Continuity planning

<http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?topicId=1074458463>



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