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Security: Hostile Attacks

Introduction

Attacks on people at events and crowds in general are found around the world. It has completely changed the security at events, and event planning as a whole. From cement bollards to bag checks, it is an irritant to every event attendee. The extra security cost of events has risen so high that many events have been cancelled. The celebratory element of the event has been diminished.

However it is not the new phenomena that the media seems to assume. Many countries have lived with political/social inspired attacks for years. If a country has hostile neighbours, terror attacks will occur. Regardless of the statistical evidence and the probability of an attack, people are so worried that the sound of a sharp crack in a crowded place can cause panic and a stampede.

This chapter describes some of the attacks on crowds at events, and what the security agencies and governments require from those who manage the crowded spaces. It is well to remember that no matter what is written here or in government recommendations, the attackers are 'free agents' and can adapt their actions to the conditions trying to prevent them.

Low-capability high-impact attacks

Much focus has been placed on terrorism characterised by *high-capability* in terms of substantial planning, resources and coordination to carry out a *high-impact* attack resulting in mass casualties, destruction and disruption, as typified by September 11, the Sri Lanka church and hotel bombings in 2019 and the Paris attacks in 2015. Table 8.1 shows a sample list of these attacks. Improvements in counter-terrorism and

intelligence capability and resources have meant that such attacks have become increasingly difficult to successfully carry out. Low-capability attacks do not possess the drawn out and complex pre-attack stage characteristic of high-capability attacks. The latter are inherently more likely to be detected and intercepted.

In recent years, the threat landscape has shifted towards *low-capability high-impact* attacks which require little or no preparation, planning or training and can be launched suddenly and with little to no warning. Low-capability high-impact terrorism is typified by a highly compressed terrorism attack process where pre-attack stages of planning, preparation and training are undertaken in very short amounts of time or removed altogether. An analysis of the terrorist attacks in Western countries in recent years reveals that in terms of number of incidents, solo perpetrator attacks dominate. Many are isolated, ad-hoc attacks undertaken by one person with little training, planning, resources or formal coordination, but ultimately inspired by extremist beliefs.

Whilst solo attacks may dominate in relation to number of incidents, it should be noted that the threat posed by more sophisticated and organised attacks has not diminished. In the case of the December 2015 Paris attacks, highly mobile small teams of one to three perpetrators armed with explosives and firearms, targeted public places and venues with the objective of maximising casualties in coordinated attacks at separate locations. This was again repeated in the attacks on Brussels which involved two coordinated attacks using improvised explosives targeting the Brussels airport and a metro station. Evidence indicating that the two attacks were linked highlights that despite the large number of perpetrators and the amount of preparation and planning involved, they were none the less able to maintain their capability to successfully launch attacks across two different countries.

Table 8.1 summarises a selection of attacks and incidents directly relevant to crowds and events. This chapter will be using the table to illustrate the security methodology for crowded places.

Name	Date	Location	Description	Attack affiliation
Boston marathon bombing	15th April 2013	Boston, USA	Two perpetrators targeting mass gathering event, use of personal explosive device (pressure cooker bombs) followed by shootout with police. Kills 4 including one police officer, injures 280. One perpetrator killed, remaining perpetrator apprehended.	No official affiliation but was inspired by extremist Islamic beliefs.
Paris 2015	13th November 2015	Paris, France	9 perpetrators divided into three teams armed with automatic weapons and suicide bombs undertake six mass shootings and three separate suicide bombings at 5 different sites. Cafes, sports, music concert, queues	Affiliated and organised by the Islamic State.
London Bridge and Market place	3 June 2017	London Bridge UK	3 attacker drove into pedestrians on the bridge, crashed the car and then stabbed people at the nearby market. 8 killed, 48 injured	Islamists inspired by Islamic State
Sri Lanka 2019 Church and Hotel bombing	21 April 2019	Various Sri Lanka	Coordinated suicide terrorist bombings in Colombo and other towns. 259 killed in three churches and hotels.	National Thowheeth Jama'ath, a local militant Islamist group.
Orlando 2016 Nightclub shooting	12th June 2016	Orlando, USA	Perpetrator armed with firearms killed 49 people in a crowded nightclub. Perpetrator was killed by police.	No official affiliation but perpetrator pledged allegiance to the Islamic State