

Soft targets are easy terror targets: increased frequency of attacks, practical preparation, and prevention

Abstract

This article illustrates the vulnerability and the increased frequency of soft targets attacked by terrorists. The article includes some of the latest soft target incidents conducted by Islamic extremist terrorists. The frequency of attacks on soft targets is expected to continue increasing, especially in the United States. The article also provides a plan for various soft targets to prepare a defense against such terror incidents. Soft targets are easy targets, so terrorists are dedicated to continue attacking these vulnerable entities. Soft targets include hospitals, restaurants, nightclubs, super markets, schools, sports venues, churches, malls, and areas where large numbers of people gather. Target hardening simply by adding security personnel is a key strategy to reduce vulnerability of soft targets.

Keywords: soft targets, lone wolf terrorists, islamic extremists, plans to defend, target hardening

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Introduction

The definition of a soft target varies somewhat, but all definitions indicate the targets are soft and easy to attack. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Wikipedia dictionaries, the definition of a soft target is identical: "a person or thing that is relatively unprotected or vulnerable, especially to military or terrorist attack",^{1,2} in other words, a soft target is an easy target. Although Wikipedia is not an acceptable reference for research, it is the same as another dictionary source and it appears to have been derived from several available sources. Wikipedia is just one alternate definition consistent with several similar definitions from other sources. Between 2007 and 2015, there were 100,685 total terror attacks that included mostly hard targets.³ The percentage of soft targets was not available, but Wikipedia provides different data about soft and hard targets. Wikipedia states that worldwide between 1968 and 2005, 72 percent (8,111) of the attacks were against soft targets and 27 percent (4,248) of the attacks were against hard targets.² The current trend is for Islamic extremists dedicated to attacking soft targets, including attacks in the United States. Another example is during the past weekend of Sept. 17 and 18, 2016 in the U.S., there were three attacks by Islamic extremists, one was a meat cleaver attack against an off duty police officer in New Jersey, a knife attack in a Minnesota mall where 10 were stabbed and slashed, and a pressure cooker attack in New York City by another Islamic extremist injuring about 29 citizens.⁴ Soft targets are easy targets as defined by various authors and are difficult to defend against attacks, and they are becoming more common.

The author of several homeland security books, Gus Martin,⁵ wrote that soft targets include places where a large number of civilians gather as well as military targets that generally are not on alert (passive), and not likely to offer confrontation. For the past several decades, terrorists have attacked targets that were both representational and soft. Today, terrorists regularly select soft targets in part because of their representational or symbolic value, and the likelihood of involving large number of casualties (p. 517). Other textbook authors, Gaines

& Kappelar,⁶ illustrated that soft targets are those civilian in nature that have very little protection and are vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The vulnerable soft targets include critical infrastructure facilities of water, energy, transportation, airlines, and hotels. Restaurants and churches are included in the list of vulnerable soft targets (pp.72-77). In addition, Mc Entire⁷ defines soft targets as "potential sites of terrorist attacks because they are open and accessible to the public" (pp. 181, 191). The Islamic State (ISIS) is increasingly using a strategy that is extending the reach of terrorism to hotels, cafés, supermarkets, and malls.⁸ The ISIS army has reached into lives of westerners around the world (Fox News, 2016). The literature review is limited in scope, but it provides a background illustrating the vulnerability and frequency of soft target attacks.

Method

There were two distinct phases to this project. The first phase of the project involved the compilation of media reports. The second phase was to illustrate target hardening of soft targets that included recommendations for plans to mitigate loss. The media reports were taken from media reports of terror attacks between the years 2013 and 2016, with the exception of one media report from 2009. The purpose of the project and the media reports is primarily to develop an awareness of the vulnerability of soft target attacks especially by lone wolf terrorists. Incidents of terror attacks against soft target in both Europe and the United States were compiled for this project. The analysis of the data of the media reports focused on revealing the seriousness of the vulnerability of soft targets and the trend of Islamic terrorist activity against soft targets. Recommendations include various steps to prevent attacks and mitigate loss.

Results of literature review

According to Spindlove and Simonsen,⁹ suicide attacks against soft targets are not a new form of terrorist attacks. They have been carried out since 1881. More recently, from 2004 and 2005, there

were some 400 suicide attacks mostly in Iraq. In 2007, there were 115 attacks worldwide in addition to the 543 in Iraq and Afghanistan, for a rising total of 658. In dozens of countries and five continents, more than 21,350 have been killed and more than 50,000 injured since 1983. They are dramatic and relatively inexpensive economically to carry out. In the UK, 13 percent of the Muslims stated in 2004 they were in favor of bombing Western targets (pp. 556- 557). In the US, there were approximately 2.5 million Muslims according to a Pew report in 2009. That number has now increased with the refugee influx in the country. If radicalization of just one percent took place, imagine the problems that would be created for Homeland Security (p. 558). The reason soft targets are called soft is because they are difficult to defend against terror attacks, if not impossible, and are easy targets for terrorists. The concept of Asymmetrical warfare “refers to the use of unconventional, unexpected and nearly unpredictable methods of political violence”.¹⁰ As a means of overcoming typical deterrent policies of society, they attack unanticipated soft targets. The weaker terrorist forces seek total war against a society in an attempt to break the enemy’s will (pp. 190-191). Homeland defense and security officials warn that soft targets are easily accessed by terrorists who blend in with the crowd, and can cause maximum destruction. Attacks in Paris and Brussels are examples of recent European soft targets being vulnerable to terrorists. According to Herridge, the Paris strikes were against soft targets of restaurants, sidewalk cafes, a concert hall, and the stadium. The security at the stadium is credited with preventing one of the suicide bombers from killing more people.¹¹ The FBI in response to the concern of U.S. soft targets recently held information sessions in the Washington, D.C., area warning bars and restaurants about potential threats of attacks by terrorists. The intelligence community has indicated that the recent attacks in Europe illustrate that terrorists will borrow criminal syndicates to help implement their agenda. They also indicated an increase in soft target attacks by terrorists because of the ease of accessibility and poor security.¹¹ In Washington, D.C., there are many former soft targets that have been hardened, by adding security, so it was necessary for the government agencies to address restaurants and bars about beefing up security. Adding security was more than telling them to report a suspicious activity.¹¹ The FBI, Homeland Security and the DC police wanted the bars and restaurants to develop an evacuation plan, post floor plans and furnish blueprints to officials. Authors Asal, et al.¹² concluded that the ideology of religion was a key factor in targeting civilians in soft targets. There was an initial decision to choose to attack soft targets and then continue to target them. Group size and network are also related to the decision leading to soft target incidents.

According to Phares,¹³ terrorists are increasingly advocating for attacks on soft targets such as hotels, cafés, supermarkets and malls to deter Western assaults on their territories.⁴ Hitting soft targets is the group’s operative countering the air operations against the Islamic state. The ISIS and Al Qaeda strategy addresses several goals:

1. Intimidation and deterrence because the public and especially companies will pressure Obama to stop for economic reasons
2. Recruiting propaganda; and
3. Extortion of protection money from companies.¹³

The New York Penn Station is a good example of a soft target. Security has tightened because of the potential of a terrorist attack. A quick glance around Penn Station reveals crammed civilians waiting for their train. A closer look will reveal soldiers around the

station in camouflage uniforms, body armor, and assault rifles in case terrorists showed up. With no metal detectors or checkpoints where you are required to take off belts and shoes, civilians are vulnerable and are expected to be alert and say something if they see something unusual.¹⁴ According to Schanzer,¹⁵ a researcher on attacks by lone wolf terrorist, these are not a new phenomenon. Nonetheless, they are a danger because they are self-radicalized loners carrying out attacks. These types of attacks have been seen in the U.S. in the past decade. Lone wolf terrorists are inspired by organized groups such as ISIS and Al Qaeda to conduct attacks on their own.¹⁵ A Washington reporter suggested a rather simple method of deterring soft target attacks by having security personnel to intercept potential terrorists in large venues before they are prepared to strike by approaching citizens and asking them some basic questions. This gives security a better chance to disrupt the attack. Security teams should ask people for identification, why they came to the venue, and look for nervous people or those who may seem out of place, or provide not able to provide answers to basic questions.¹⁶ Attacks against nightclubs, restaurants, malls, and schools, have become more frequent.¹⁷ Churches are also vulnerable as soft targets. And it makes sense. Terrorists generally attack where their opponents are weakest. As such, terrorists focus on soft sites. Where embassies might once have made attractive options, assailants now tend to attack hotels near embassies. As terrorism evolves by shifting to soft targets from hardened targets, security evolves. Even the targets that we consider hard today have not always been so fortified.¹⁷

Hardening of soft targets is not an easy task according to Stewart, and sometimes the hardening is too late, coming after an attack. As terrorists widen their target set, the public must modify their behavior to protect their well being. There are increasing numbers of soft target attacks. One example is when eight patrons of a café in Tel Aviv were murdered on June 9, 2016 by two terrorists when they were shot and killed.¹⁷ Lone wolf terrorists have adopted the leaderless resistance model, such as the attack four days after the Tel Aviv attack on June 13 in Orlando at the Pulse nightclub where 49 were killed and 53 injured. The next day, a police captain was killed with a knife in Paris. These three incidents shared one critical theme; they were all directed at soft targets. Corporations are generally soft targets and therefore are at risk.

Lone wolf attacks provide risks for corporations and their security personnel. The terrorist’s have a ritual they follow when preparing an attack. The actions of the ritual cycle associated with an attack can be detected and prevented.¹⁷ According to Stewart, terrorist preparation ritual, or cycle, includes:

- a. Identifying a target
- b. Surveillance
- c. Further preparation; and
- d. Deployment.

There are vulnerabilities that can be identified in the cycle by:

- a. Spotting terrorist surveillance
- b. Keeping eyes on a potential target
- c. Observing demeanor; and
- d. Knowing the principles of surveillance detection.¹⁷

Terrorist threats are a new normal of everyday life, especially for travel to foreign countries. Since the 1960s, the beginning of modern terrorism, few places had the level of security required to protect against a terrorist attack. After various terrorist attacks in the U.S. and Mideast, organizations and governments have hardened once vulnerable structural targets. Whenever a new method of attack is attempted or discovered, changes in security take place, only to have the terrorists try to implement a new method. Take for example the evolution of TSA countermeasures as of the result of the shoe bomber; the underwear bomber; and the bomb concealed in a soda can that changed the amount of liquid passengers can carry aboard a plane. Subsequently, there is a constant evolution of terror methods and security methods, each trying to get an advantage over the other. Now we have the problem of hostages being taken in the Middle East and ransom being paid by the U.S. to free four hostages in Iran; an added security risk for U.S. travelers.¹⁷

There is a vast array of soft targets

Jihadist threats now include lone wolf (grassroots) operatives. Soft target attacks are becoming more frequent. Jihadist propagandists encourage simple attacks using readily available weapons. Furthermore, lone wolf operatives favor attacking targets close to where they live, increasing the number of vulnerable targets at risk. Government and security is not capable of protecting every vulnerable target. A sensible solution is for people to recognize problems and adjust to them. Recognizing problems requires understanding the terrorist cycle and where they are most vulnerable to discovery. With the understanding, situational awareness is possible to avoid or lessen potential threats. People are responsible for their own safety and must take necessary steps to make themselves and families harder targets.¹⁷

Seven venues of soft targets

The soft targets believed to be next on the list of terrorists based on gathered sources of intelligence include seven venues.¹⁸

Americans traveling abroad: Civilian's traveling abroad are at risk as targets and encouraged to enroll in the State Department Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP), for updates and ease of embassies to contact them in an emergency.

New York city: The New York Times reported in late 2015, a video from ISIS appeared to threaten Manhattan with suicide bombings.

Cruise ships: The Islamic State terror groups are attempting to build a navy to wage war on the sea against the West. Shopping areas. Several mall attacks have taken place, for example, in 2014 an American teacher was stabbed to death by a female at a mall in Abu Dhabi.

Airplanes: Al-Qaida has issued warnings that it now has developed bombs that are completely undetectable.

Churches and synagogues: In late 2014, two Muslims attacked Jewish worshippers at a synagogue in Jerusalem, one of many against Israel over the years.

Schools: In 2014 in Nigeria, Boko Haram abducted school children; and terrorist's murdered 140 school children in Pakistan. The BBC reported in 2015 that terror attacks are the highest ever against schools and colleges around the world.¹⁸

Hospital suicide bombers and armed assault

Pounds¹⁹ examined the reasons for terrorist attacks on hospitals around the globe. Hospitals in the U.S. are under direct threat from

Islamist extremist attacks for a myriad of reasons. According to Pounds, suicide bombers are the most common attacks against hospitals. The second most common is armed assault. They are generally open to the public with multiple entrances, which means identification and baggage of visitors is almost never screened, leaving them vulnerable to suicide bomber attacks. The long hallways can mean that escape from armed assault is almost impossible. Hospitals do not have reliable means of protecting those in the building, including patients, visitors and employees, from terror attacks, leaving hospitals very vulnerable.¹⁹ The list of hospital attacks began with Russia in 1995 (140 deaths), with only one attack in Chicago (56 deaths) within the United States in 2003 and the last attack in Afghanistan in 2014 Table 1.

Table 1 Hospital attacks

Date	Country	Incident
Apr. 24, 2014	Afghanistan	3 American doctors killed. Afghan police officer opened fire at a Christian hospital
Apr. 15, 2014	Nigeria	9 killed. Terrorist group burns Christian worship center and hospital.
Feb. 20, 2014	Afghanistan	Security guard killed. Suicide bomber attacked hospital in Kabul.
Dec. 12, 2013	Yemen	56 killed. Group of attackers stormed hospital targeting doctors, nurses and patients.
Oct. 18, 2013	Syria	Fifth floor of Jaramana hospital bombed
June 15, 2013	Pakistan	25 killed, 19 injured when a female suicide bomber detonated explosives on a bus. A second suicide bomber detonated explosives at the emergency room entrance, then gunmen entered the hospital.
June 03, 2013	Iraq	11 killed, 30 injured in a sophisticated attack; one suicide bomber detonated his explosives at a mosque during prayers. When family and dignitaries began arriving at a nearby hospital a second suicide bomber blew himself up near the emergency room.
Dec. 2003	Chicago	Joe Applebaum died after waiting 12 hours in the Rush North Shore Medical Center emergency room because chief resident Muslim Dr. Osama Ahmed Ibrahim refused to treat him because he was Jewish.
Aug. 01, 2003	Russia	56 killed, over 80 injured; suicide bomber in explosives-laden truck drove past security, detonating explosives near reception office. Parts of the hospital collapsed.
June 14-19, 1995	Russia	140 killed, 415 injured. Some 50 Chechen rebels in a column of trucks attack police station, then retreated to a hospital taking about 2,000 hostages.

Female terrorists

In addition, the use of women terrorists (see Pounds' article Female Suicide Bombers) has increased the threat of terrorism in industries with high numbers of female employees, making hospitals an inviting terrorist venue for recruiting women because of the large numbers of women working in hospitals. Hospitals are part of the nation's critical infrastructure. With these two variables and the large numbers of employees, patients, and visitors at any given time, hospital attacks are an easy target for mass casualties.¹⁹

Physician terrorists

About 25 percent of all American physicians are International Medical Graduates (IMGs). Many have special visas to practice medicine in the U.S. Both foreign and domestic physicians have become radicalized by Islamist extremist ideologies. Terrorists are very good at recruiting physicians and other health care professionals sympathetic to the radical Islamist cause. The prominence of supposed Socratic Oath of do-no-harm physicians take illustrates that Islamist extremists have no boundaries when it comes to attacking innocent civilians. Below is a brief list of the physicians who have engaged in terrorist attacks.¹⁹

- a. Ayman al-Zawahiri Egyptian, a pediatrician and Osama bin Laden's second in command. After he was charged with the death of 62 tourists in Egypt, al Zawahiri made the FBI's Most Wanted Terrorists list.
- b. Mohammad Rabi Al-Zawahiri, a pharmacologist, father of Ayman Al-Zawahiri and supporter of the Muslim Brotherhood.
- c. Nidal Hassan, psychiatrist, and U.S. Army major who killed 13 and wounded 32 at the Ft. Hood military installation.
- d. Abu Hafiza, psychiatrist and commander of a terrorist cell in Morocco who helped provide logistics for the Twin Tower attacks.
- e. Rafiq Sabir Boca Raton emergency room physician convicted in an Al Qaeda terror plot.
- f. July 2007 – A statement threatening to use car bombs and grenades to attack the U.S., including a navy base was issued by 45 physicians.
- g. July 2007 – Seven male physicians and one female medical technician from Britain's National Health Service made terroristic threats.

Another area of concern is radiation use in hospitals.

Radioactive materials

The United States Nuclear Regulatory Commission (USNRC) states that approximately 33 percent of all hospital patients in the U.S. are diagnosed or treated with radioactive materials called radiopharmaceuticals, a source that can easily be used for dirty bombs and a major concern of the intelligence community. Furthermore, as of 2012, the Government Accountability Office determined that nearly 80 percent of U.S. did not maintain adequate security of radiological material.¹⁹

Liability

Hospitals are vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Courts have stated they are at risk and that patients have a right to a safe environment

while receiving health care. Furthermore, according to the courts, it is the responsibility of hospitals to provide physical and personal security of patients, staff and visitors.¹⁸ Since it is their responsibility and with a record of terror attacks in the past, they are liable for safety against attacks.

Actual terrorist attacks on hospitals

The vulnerability of hospitals and the risk of terrorist attacks are evident by the most recent terror attacks against hospitals. The list of hospital attacks shows the seriousness of this issue toward administrators, doctors, nurses and patients.¹⁹ As illustrated in Table 1, hospitals and their personnel are vulnerable soft targets. Farah²⁰ advised adding another "G" for guns to the acronym, LGBT. He stated that LGBT nightclubs are vulnerable soft targets where such a tragedy such as in Orlando should never happen again. According to Farah, Obama's is statement about the problem with the nightclub was not that there were too many guns in the nightclub, it was that there were too few, and Omar Mateen monopolized all of the guns.²⁰ Islamic terrorists have figured out that gay nightclubs are soft targets, human slaughterhouses, and they do not expect any armed resistance because they are gun free zones. If the patrons were allowed to carry guns, the slaughter would have been much less. Gun-free zones may be the most dangerous places on earth.²⁰ Farah specified that we should heed the warning of Orlando, the two attacks in Israel, and one in Seattle. There's no excuse for another massacre like or land in a gay nightclub, in a church, a school, nor in any mandated gun-free zone.²⁰

Lone wolves

Radicalization of individuals who plan to act as lone wolves is a growing problem. For example, federal agents arrested a man in North Carolina who planned to develop an Islamic sleeper cell in the U.S. He had been in contact with two Texas extremists who planned to attack people attending the Draw the Prophet Muhammad cartoon contest in 2015.⁴ Another radicalization took pace with the Dallas shooter that killed five police officers as well as the San Bernardino shooters.

Churches

Churches are also soft targets and vulnerable to terror attacks. For example, nine people were killed during Bible study at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, South Carolina by Dylann Roof who has been charged with hate crimes and related offenses by the federal and state government for the church shootings in Charleston, SC. Allegedly, Roof wanted to start a race war according to prosecutors.²¹ In France, terrorists hit their target by slitting the throat of the clergyman and created a short hostage situation before police took them out. The killing of a Catholic priest in a small parish in Normandy by men claiming allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) group has raised questions about France's ability to secure tens of thousands of churches across the country. Authorities in France were aware that churches were terror targets before the attack that killed a priest and four were wounded during a morning mass. In its propaganda the ISIS group often makes reference to the crusades and the kingdom of the cross. Supporters of ISIS encourage followers to attack when they are most vulnerable. The Catholic community was targeted earlier in 2015 when an Algerian student attempted to carry out an attack on another church outside of Paris.²²

Defending churches

The vast majority of churches lack sufficient security measures in case of an attack. In the past 30 years, there have been at least 70

incidents of mass murders. According to Follman, Aronsen, and Pan, a majority of the perpetrators were mentally ill and several showed signs of being ill before the killing incidents.²³ These obviously were not all terrorist attacks, but to the public, they were attacks of terror. “The Islamic State and Al Qaeda are increasingly mounting and call for attacks of soft targets as a means of deterring Western assaults on their strong holds, a strategy that is extending their reach of terrorism to hotels, cafés, supermarkets and malls where Europeans and Americans once felt safe”.¹⁷ All of these 70 tragedies between 1982 and 2015 were in soft target areas with crowds of people and victims not armed and not prepared to defend themselves.²³ Several of these were churches. Violence in churches has spared almost no denomination, reaching some 27 different church denominations. The leading church denomination with the most violent incidents are Baptist and non-denominational with 219 and 211 respectively followed by Catholic with 142, Methodists with 68, and Lutheran with 38 violent incidents.²⁴ In all according to Chinn,²⁴ there were 971 deadly force incidents resulting in 335 deaths. There were 419 known triggers that included domestic spillovers (131), personal not domestic (97), robbery (191), gang and drug related (99), mental illness (84), religious bias (47), and random (120). The other incident triggers were unknown. The weapon used most was a gun with 576 followed by a knife with 168. Almost 31 percent (295) occurred inside the building.²⁴ Based on this last statistic, it is clear that churches are vulnerable to attack on the inside. Security is becoming increasingly important for churches. Acts of violence, vandalism, and disruption of services have been rising steadily across the country.

Preparing a defense

Besides churches, soft targets can also be automobiles, houses, or an assembly of people. This can also be applied to apparent readiness. People who vary their schedules and avoid patterns have a strong security measure for their home, or when they adopt other forms of visible readiness, would not be a soft target. In surveillance, a soft target would have little variance in travel patterns and a visibly low state of situation awareness. Churches generally have a set pattern so they need strong security measures and readiness. There are similarities in terrorist planning that have become obvious from the perspective of the lone wolf Jihadist and small-cell Islamic extremist attacks. When developing a defense against church attacks (or other entities)²⁵ provides six points to consider:

1. The terrorist will first select or identify a vulnerable soft target.
2. The terrorist will determine the method of attack.
3. They will conduct detailed surveillance of the target to measure security forces.
4. They will assess target vulnerability and select the site or move on to another.
5. After site selection, a second round of surveillance will be conducted
6. Finally, the operation will be scheduled and the attack conducted.

French also said to be in a high level of situational awareness. Recognizing threats when conducting routine activities can make a difference.²⁵ The reason for attacking soft targets is for maximum publicity and instilling fear. A terrorist can get maximum press coverage and create incredible fear when people are murdered.²⁵ It is impossible for government to prevent all attacks, so people have to

assume responsibility for their own security. The threat against soft targets requires common sense practical security measures. It also involves applying an appropriate degree of situational awareness of the environment a person is in. There should also be an appropriate contingency plans for families and business²⁶ including churches.

Discussion

The United States is having its share of soft target attacks. It seems almost every week there is another soft target terrorist attack, especially since the San Bernardino attack in 2015. The 2015 November and December terrorist attacks in Paris and San Bernardino respectively have raised awareness about the threat of terrorism in the United States. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) defines these terrorists as those “who support or commit ideologically-motivated violence to further political goals”.²⁷ These attacks were against soft targets. According to Ted ford, churches and worship centers are places without extensive security and are considered vulnerable as soft targets much like malls, restaurants, stores, athletic facilities, and theaters since they are relatively unprotected. A church does not have to be helpless against terrorism. A few steps toward education, assessment, and planning can prepare for threats a church may face.²⁷ The first step is education. Group members should understand the threat of terrorism and the methods used by terrorists, such as mass shootings, knife attacks, explosive devices, chemical or biological threats, radiological dispersion devices, and cyber-attacks to name a few. Information on threats of terrorism can be found on the website of the Department of Homeland Security.²⁷ The second step is assessment. The church group should identify potential hazards and assess your vulnerability to them. It is also a good practice to assess medical emergencies, fires, extreme weather and natural disasters in addition to an active shooter situation. Consulting with law enforcement agency to provide recommendations when conducting a security assessment of their facility is important.²⁷ The third step is planning. Develop an emergency plan to address the threats identified in the assessment. Consider evacuation, shelter, lockdown, and communication with the congregation. Include the level of protection appropriate for your location. Some churches may have off duty police officers in attendance, armed professional security, or trained volunteers.²⁷ A fourth step is to review the plan and prepare with practice drills. The DHS and FBI provide documents on active shooter situations.

A plan recommended by Chinn²⁷) includes several steps of readiness for an emergency that converse a terrorist attack or a natural disaster. These steps are: having an emergency plan with standard procedures to handle disruptions; designate a director of security; surveillance in and around the building to counter any disruption; use multiple layers of security that include ushers and greeters and parking lot watchers; ushers and greeters, and volunteers should be trained on what to look; be ready to lockdown childcare facilities if appropriate; have a check-in and check-out system in place for childcare; conduct background checks for employees and volunteers; keep a list of medical personnel in congregation who will volunteer; and, designate one person to call 911 when appropriate; isolate and remove those that disrupt the service. According to Alliance Defending Freedom²⁸, churches have a right to keep disruptors out even though churches are open to the public. There is no protected right violation to keep a person from entering the church since it is private property.

According to Javers, the Minneapolis police in conjunction with terrorism experts, and representatives from the NFL developed an

8-step plan of instructions on how to intercept terrorists before an attack (17). The plan was designed to prepare and minimize loss.¹⁶ Javers laid out an 8-step plan to prepare and help prepare for an attack. The plan is based on intelligence reports indicating ISIS and al-Qaida spent time preparing their attacks. Each of the eight steps represents an opportunity to disrupt an attack before it happens. The eight steps of preparation are:

Surveillance: Watch for people taking pictures in places where tourists normally do not, such as doors, security checkpoints, and staff areas.

Information gathering: Observations of suspected behavior should include anyone asking detailed questions being asked of people onsite, including inquiring about shift changes and facility access. Look for business attention by anyone that does appear to have legitimate business at a site.

Testing security: Sometimes terrorists initiate a false alarm and time the response;

Funding: Financial experts and those witnessing transactions should take the opportunity to ask questions about where money is to be sent.

Acquiring supplies: terrorists may rent or purchase vehicles and equipment for the attack. Be aware of large cash transactions or untraceable cash card purchases; ask questions about the purchase.

Impersonation: Stolen uniforms of construction workers, medical personnel, or public safety personnel can be used for an attack as well; report thefts.

Rehearsal: Another opportunity to intervene is when terrorists may conduct a dry run.

Deployment: terrorists have to gather their weapons, so if you see weapons or explosives in a car, on the sidewalk, or in or at a site should immediately call 911; a quick response by police lessens the impact of an attack.¹⁶

Conclusion

A review of the literature illustrated the risk and vulnerability of various types of soft targets and the increased attacks against them. One way to reduce the risk of soft targets is to harden them; this reduces their vulnerability and risk. Sometimes target hardening is expensive and sometimes not. Adding security personnel is an effective means to lessen vulnerability and make the soft target hardened. In order to be prepared for an attack, the organization must have a plan. Members of the organization must practice the plan so they so they are ready to respond to emergencies to minimize disruption in the organization, property damage, and most importantly, injuries and loss of life.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflicts of interest

None.

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