

## Lessons Learned Overseas

by  
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While the United States has not experienced a major terrorist attack since September 11, 2001, there have been continual terrorist attacks around the globe. According to the National Counter Terrorism Center’s (NCTC) Worldwide Incident Tracking System (WITS)<sup>i</sup>, during 2004 there were only five terrorist incidents in the US (accounting for one injury). Conversely, during the same time period there were 3,192 terrorist incidents worldwide, resulting in 6,060 deaths and 16,091 wounded victims.

During 2004, 1,080 police officers were killed by terrorists and another 1,370 police officers were wounded by terrorists outside the US. Table one represents the number of officers killed and wounded versus the total number of people killed and wounded. The data seems to suggest that

police officers who are victims of a terrorist act are much more likely to be killed (as opposed to wounded) than civilians who are victims of a terrorist act.

	Police	Total
Incidents	590	3192
Fatalities	1080	6060
Wounded	1370	16091

Table One<sup>ii</sup>

### Police officers’ becoming victims

Terrorist Incidents 2004 by Region			
Region	Total	Police	Percentage
South Asia	1043	207	19.80%
Africa	64	8	12.50%
Central/South America	90	9	10%
East Asia Pacific	265	62	23%
Eurasia	205	70	34%
Europe	319	43	13%
Middle East/Persian Gulf	1196	190	15.80%
North American/Caribbean	10*	2	20%
Total Incidents	3192	591	18.50%

\*The two incidents involving police officers in the North American/Caribbean region occurred in Haiti

\*\*Data developed from the NCTC, WITS

Table Two

of terrorist attacks appear to be a world-wide phenomenon. Table two represents a breakdown of those attacks by region. The information indicates, as we know, the Middle East and Southeast Asia are particularly dangerous areas. The third column of table two shows the percentage of police officers who are victims of terrorism. It is interesting to note that

while police officers on average are targets of terrorism roughly 18.5 percent of the time world-wide,

## Lessons Learned Overseas

they are slightly more than 11 percent of the total number of victims. Perhaps, though police officers may be targeted by terrorists, their training and/or equipment may prevent them from becoming casualties.

### **Are Police Officers Targeted?**

The data from outside the US seems to indicate that police officers are specifically targeted by terrorists. Like the US, many countries rely on internal police organizations to pursue criminal investigations against terrorists. Simply put, the data indicates that police officers worldwide are on the front line in the War Against Terror. They are the ones making arrests, guarding critical facilities and responding to the scenes of terrorist acts. Indeed, a closer look at terrorist acts reveals that among the incidents involving police officers, fatalities occur during attempts to arrest terrorists<sup>iii</sup>, guard duty of critical facilities,<sup>iv</sup> response to situations<sup>v</sup>, the conducting of routine operations, such as traffic control<sup>vi</sup>, and off-duty ambushes<sup>vii</sup>.

It also appears that police officers may be targeted because of their occupation. First, they are one of the most visible forms of civilian government. Terrorists seeking to strike at a government may view police officers as symbols of that government. Perhaps more importantly, the public views police officers as symbols of order and peace. Recall that the definition of a terrorist act involves striking at non-combatants in order to generate fear. It may be that police officers are specifically targeted because citizens become even more fearful when they see the people who are armed and charged with the responsibility of protecting the community fall victim.

Although US policing has not experienced anything close to the carnage of our brothers and sisters worldwide, it may be instructive to use the information from those attacks to attempt to determine likely circumstances and weapons that would be used in an attack on police officers in other regions, then review tactics designed to increase officer safety. Table three classifies the attacks on police officers<sup>viii</sup>. Table four outlines the weapons used by the terrorists.

## Lessons Learned Overseas

Type of Incident	Number of Incidents	Killed	Wounded
Bombed Vehicle	3	8	6
Station Attacked	106	381	452
Ambushed	32	68	63
During Enforcement	3	1	17
Off-duty	43	38	16
Secondary Device	7	4	32
Other/Unknown	396	580	784
	<b>590</b>	<b>1080</b>	<b>1370</b>

\*\*Data developed from the NCTC, WITS

Table Three

### Bombing Police Vehicles

According to the NCTC, “on September 3, 2004, in Khaki Forest, Giridih District, Jharkhand, India, militants detonated a bomb under a police vehicle, killing five police officers and wounding three others<sup>ix</sup>.” In the early 1970s certain

domestic terrorist groups (or militant groups as they were called at the time) detonated bombs that were either placed on the ground underneath or attached to the undercarriage of the police vehicle. One attack involved members of a terrorist group taping a hand grenade to the gas tank of a patrol vehicle while the officers were at lunch. An improvised device designed to pull the pin would have been activated by the officers driving forward from their parking spot. The officer’s lives were saved because they drove backward out of the parking spot, unaware of the device<sup>x</sup>. That incident led to the spread of the simple tactic of officers’ looking under their vehicle before they entered it any time they were away from the vehicle. This tactic led to the discovery of other devices and is a simple way to foil this type of attack.

### Station Defense

According to the NCTC, “on August 20, 2004, in Semdinli, Hakkari Province, Turkey, gunmen opened fire on a Turkish police station, injuring two police officers<sup>xi</sup>.” Police stations have also been bombed<sup>xii</sup> and attacked with military style weapons<sup>xiii</sup>; however, the most prevalent type of weapon used in all attacks was firearms. Table four represents a breakdown of the terrorist incidents by weapon used. Clearly, firearms are the most prevalent and deadly.

## Lessons Learned Overseas

Weapon	Number of Incidents	% of Total	Killed	% of Total	Wounded	% of Total
Firearm	206	35%	369	34%	217	16%
Bomb	188	31.80%	288	26.60%	635	46%
Military Weapon*	105	18%	213	20%	339	24%
Edged Weapon	3	0.01%	5	0.01%	15	0.01%
Other	88	15%	205	19%	164	12%

\*\*Data developed from the NCTC, WITS

\*Such as hand grenade, land mine, rocket, missile, etc (terms like "machine gun" were counted as firearms)

Table Four

All agencies should consider implementing station defense plans and reviewing their station routines and structure for weaknesses. On how many summer nights have you found the back door to the station propped open? Can your desk officers be seen through a plate glass door from the street? How many police officers view desk duty as vacation from the street and do not wear their Sam Browne or other duty equipment? During the 1960s and 1970s, police stations in the US were attacked by terrorist groups. Revisiting the tactics and procedures implemented during those times may be a good starting point for improving station defense.

As we noted in previous articles, it is important to view our preparation and planning for terrorist incidents as “all-hazards” planning. The construction and remodeling of police stations should be conducted under the umbrella of “all-hazards” planning that includes potential terrorist attacks. A good starting point may be to conduct a “Needs Analysis” of your station. Recall that a Needs Analysis involves the determination of likely events, the state of current preparation and a determination of needs to completely prepare. What could happen and what could you do now to improve your response?

### Ambush

According to the NCTC, “on August 4, 2004, in Patnos, Agri Province, Turkey, unidentified gunmen fired at a police vehicle, killing one police officer and injuring one other<sup>xiv</sup>.” It is clear from the data that ambush and station attack are the two primary terrorist incidents aimed at police

## Lessons Learned Overseas

officers. According to the NCTC data, ambushes against police officers overseas generally take on two forms: An explosive device is detonated as the police officers drive by, or gunmen assault the vehicle from positions of concealment. In the US, we should consider two additional variations on the ambush. The first variation is a false radio call that draws police officers into an ambush zone. The second variation is a terrorist's committing a minor traffic violation in order to attack the officer during the stop.

Countering ambushes involves a re-examination of basic field tactics. During radio calls, officers should avoid parking in front of the location, be mindful of people who may be acting as lookouts, etc. For traffic stops, officers should attempt to select the location of the stop, position their vehicle tactically and be mindful of furtive movements by the traffic violator. Countering all ambushes means officers should know the difference between cover and concealment, practice moving into the "cone of fire" and move quickly away from the police vehicle because it is likely to draw fire.

### **During Enforcement**

According to the NCTC, "On February 17, 2004, in the morning, in the Zavodskoy District, Groznyy, Chechnya, Russia, a bomb exploded during a search operation by OMON (Special Forces Police Detachment) officers, injuring the deputy commander<sup>xv</sup>." It is interesting to note that during enforcement operations like serving warrants and making arrests, police officers overseas seem to receive fewer injuries<sup>xvi</sup>. A likely reason is that they are in a heightened state of awareness and have pre-planned the operation. Both are extraordinarily valuable officer-survival tips. Training, awareness and preplanning are probably the best prevention. Indeed, when coupled with solid field tactics and well-maintained equipment, a police officer's survivability surely increases.

### **Off-duty**

According to the NCTC, WITS, "on June 17, 2004, in the Arghakhanchi District, Nepal, gunmen fired upon a group of out-of-uniform police officers shopping at a local bazaar, killing two

## Lessons Learned Overseas

officers and wounding two others<sup>xvii</sup>.” In another incident reported by the NCTC, WITS, “on November 2, 2004, at night, in the village of Litter, Pulwama, Kashmir, India, armed militants shot and killed a police officer in his home<sup>xviii</sup>.” Being off-duty should be the perfect undercover assignment. You blend in completely with everyone in your personal community. Avoiding wearing insignias on your clothing, appropriately concealing off-duty weapons and ensuring that your private data is protected are essential steps in avoiding off-duty conflicts. More importantly, before taking action, off-duty police officers should strongly consider that they lack the support and equipment available while on-duty; and that they are likely to bear the additional concern of exposing family and friends to danger.

### Secondary Devices

According to the NCTC, “On January 15, 2004, at approximately 3:20 PM, in Karachi, Pakistan, two bombs exploded within 15 minutes of each other at the Pakistan Bible Society building. The first blast damaged the building but caused no casualties. Later, a car bomb exploded, injuring three police officers and 12 civilians who had gathered to inspect the damage from the first blast and damaging 18 nearby vehicles<sup>xix</sup>.” Secondary devices are intended to kill or wound first responders. A post-blast scene is **NOT** a safe scene. In addition to evidence collection and preservation and any unsafe conditions (like damaged structures and hazards chemicals), police officers must be mindful of secondary devices. Considerations range from suspicious, undamaged vehicles to the use of the police radio, which might accidentally detonate a device.

### Conclusions

By examining and debriefing terrorist events overseas we are able to identify training, education and equipment needs in our own agencies and communities. News from overseas is an opportunity to ask “What if that happened here?” In our next article, we will journey further into homeland security and terrorism by examining how technology can supplement solid tactical training and increase your counterterrorism skills.

## Lessons Learned Overseas

### About the Author

Lieutenant Raymond E. Foster retired from the Los Angeles Police Department after 24 years of service. He is the author of “Police Technology (Prentice Hall, July 2004) and numerous articles on technology, leadership, terrorism and policing. Raymond is a part-time lecture at California State University, Fullerton and a part-time faculty advisor at the Union Institute and University. He has three current book projects. They are on terrorism, policing and leadership.

Raymond’s complete CV can be viewed at [www.hitechcj.com/id55.html](http://www.hitechcj.com/id55.html) and he can be reached by email at <mailto:raymond@hitechcj.com>.

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<sup>i</sup> A synopsis of all 591 incidents can be viewed at <http://www.hitechcj.com/id201.html>.

<sup>ii</sup> All tabular data developed from the National Counterterrorism Center, World Incident Tracking System.

<sup>iii</sup> According to the NCTC WITS, “on April 3, 2004, in Madrid, Spain, suspected terrorists detonated several bombs in an apartment building, killing one police officer and wounding fifteen others. The suspects, who allegedly conducted the 11 March 2004 Madrid bombings, blew themselves up after police had surrounded the building where they were hiding, in order to avoid being captured.” NCTC WITS ICN Number 200466399.

<sup>iv</sup> According to the NCTC WITS, “on June 7, 2004, in the Kharar District, Logar Province, Afghanistan, militants attacked a government headquarters building, killing one police officer.” NCTC WITS ICN Number 200458216.

<sup>v</sup> According to the NCTC WITS, “on January 5, 2004, in Pattani, Thailand, an improvised explosive device strapped to a motorcycle in a park exploded as two technicians attempted to defuse it, killing both engineers.” NCTC WITS ICN Number 200458454.

<sup>vi</sup> According to the NCTC WITS, “on March 23, 2004, in Yala Province, Thailand, assailants shot and killed a police officer while he was directing traffic.” NCTC WITS ICN Number 200458509.

<sup>vii</sup> According to the NCTC WITS, “on January 6, 2004, in the Tetaria Village, Morang, Nepal, unidentified gunmen shot and killed an off-duty police officer. NCTC, WITS ICN Number 200460008.

<sup>viii</sup> There are a few caveats regarding the constructs of this table. The synopses provided by the NCTC were very brief. An incident was only classified as “bombed a police vehicle” if the synopsis mentioned the device being attached to the officer’s vehicle. It is likely that some of the attacks classified as unknown included these attacks. Also, an incident was only classified as an ambush if the synopsis had the word ambush. Many of the synopses were likely to have been ambush type attacks; and, some attacks, like those occurring off-duty, clearly were ambushes.

<sup>ix</sup> NCTC, WITS ICN Number 200459779.

<sup>x</sup> The information concerning this incident was obtained in a confidential interview of one of the involved officers.

<sup>xi</sup> NCTC, WITS ICN Number: 200461069.

<sup>xii</sup> According to the NCTC WITS, “on January 14, 2004, in Ba’qubah, Iraq, a suicide car bomber attacked a police station, killing two civilians and injuring 26 local police officers.” NCTC, WITS ICN Number 200458141.

<sup>xiii</sup> According to the NCTC WITS, “on April 12, 2004, in Kirkuk, Iraq, unknown militants fired two mortar rounds at a police post, killing one Iraqi police officer and injuring four civilians.” NCTC WITS Number 200464020.

<sup>xiv</sup> NCTC, WITS ICN Number: 200461045.

<sup>xv</sup> NCTC WITS, ICN Number 200460383.

<sup>xvi</sup> As noted by the data in Table three this accounts for the smallest number of police officers killed in the line of duty and third smallest number wounded.

<sup>xvii</sup> NCTC WITS, ICN Number 200459707.

<sup>xviii</sup> NCTC WITS, ICN Number 200461623.

<sup>xix</sup> NCTC, WITS ICN Number 200460780.