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## PREPARING FOR TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE

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In light of all the recent events occurring both overseas and in the United States, it seems that we may be in the midst of an ongoing increase in violence against our citizens. This increase means that it is becoming increasingly important for Americans and American businesses to be prepared to defend and protect their people and physical assets against acts of terrorism and violence. It does beg the question; how does one prepare to defend themselves against an ideology or acts of violence as vicious and senseless as those recently perpetrated in Texas and Ohio?

Unfortunately, the terms terrorists and terrorism have a broad meaning and are rather poorly defined by our government. One such statutory definition, albeit imperfect, may be found in Title 22 of the U.S. Code, Section 2656f(d), which defines terrorism as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents”. This particular definition’s purpose is to articulate the types of incidents that the Secretary of State must annually report to Congress. While it is strictly limited to *international* terrorism incidents, for purposes of this article, let’s consider the effect of such a definition if it were to be applied domestically.

If I am accosted in a theater by a group of people with a certain political ideology, when might it be considered terrorism under this particular statutory definition? A hardline approach may demonstrate how politicians and experts, who may be distant to any single incident, sometimes fail to understand how such particular persons or incidents may not so easily fit into such preconceived definitions of terrorism. For instance, in this case, if that political ideology was not clearly definable or was not strictly political, would such an incident not be considered terrorism since it was not necessarily politically motivated? Further, adopting these policy-based or statutory-based approaches may create situations in which incidents are superficially chosen for meeting such definitions of terrorism, without a complete understanding of the social and cultural dynamics at play. This may exacerbate and cause further division within the current social environment resulting in even more strongly contested views between various ideologies and the manners in which they are portrayed by the media or understood by others.

Such definitions and labels are really only relevant, however, during post-event analysis and far less important for threat response purposes. One way of over-simplifying such a statutory definition is to understand terrorism as a person who causes violence to achieve a particular goal. Take each part in step: a person, an act, a goal. When responding to violence, we address the act, remaining indifferent to the person and usually ignoring their goal. Therefore, for purposes of preparing and responding to violence, what, who, or why a terrorist is or does, is not the primary concern. We are primarily concerned with our response capabilities in combatting specific acts of violence or terror.

While media and experts often attempt, at tiresome length, to explain why we are under attack, such explanations and expositions have neither stopped nor prevented a single attack. Further, such dialogs will not help you if you are currently involved in a violent incident since they only operate in hindsight. Therefore, for purposes of preparing oneself for violence, the key is to understand what you are prepared to do in the moment rather than understanding why someone else is perpetrating violence.

Therefore, the more appropriate focus is on understanding what is an act of violence and how do we best respond to acts of violence? If a person is carjacked, they will feel the terror of such senseless violence. If you are involved in a violent incident, it is unlikely that you will take the time to consider such labels while under assault, and while it may be tempting to search for the reasons for such violence in the aftermath it is unlikely that a victim will find reason in the mind of any criminal driven to such depravity. Understanding criminals and putting labels on such behavior seems far less important than your own training and understanding the act of violence and what you are prepared to do.

Learning to prepare yourself for action in such situations will not always decrease the odds of you becoming involved in such an incident but neither will passivity, ignorance or complacency. Citizens become easy targets since they will likely not fight back due to their lack of the necessary preparation to act. Like many of his colleagues with a law enforcement background, experience has taught this author that civilians must prepare themselves because the response time of law enforcement is not necessarily going to save you.

### **How to prepare – Are you willing and able to defend yourself?**

Are you willing and able to inflict violence on a person? This is a question that you need to be prepared to answer. In my experience as a Marine and working for a government agency, I have found that most people are squeamish when thinking about shooting, stabbing, or beating another human. This is normal for well-adjusted law-abiding individuals without military or LE training, or absent environmental or genetic conditions that may predispose individuals to such acts. Always remember, however, that the person attacking you may not necessarily feel the same way. Remorse and squeamishness may be eliminated with training or may never have existed in the first place in certain attackers. Most persons are not prepared to respond with the necessary violent action to thwart a personal attack. Are you truly willing and able to actually pull the trigger on a firearm knowing the result of the shot is to injure or to kill a person within your sights? More difficult is the thought of taking a knife and fiercely jamming it into a person's body with the intent of killing them.

In training and in combat, the average military person has a designated enemy, and they have others around him willing to engage an adversary. Killing is a necessary, mechanical function of their mission and training. Yet, even many of these people still return from combat with traumatic mental injuries.

Some people may take the position of simply waiting for law enforcement to save them, however based on my law enforcement experience, most police officers are faced with impossibly difficult judgements when determining whether to engage a threat. It is inherently difficult to make these

decisions in the fog of battle when a very fine line separates a “lawful shooting”, life in prison as a murderer, or the officer’s own demise at the barrel of a perpetrator’s gun, especially when life or death is determined in fractions of a second. In the fog of battle, not only is there a general delay in response time to the actual incident, there are additional specific delays in response time to each aspect of the engagement. Even the most die-hard law enforcement advocates should see the inherent problems with unconditionally trusting officers to perform flawlessly in this fog every single time they respond to an incidence of violence.

While this author believes that everyone has a god given and constitutional right to defend themselves, if you are in fact willing to defend yourself, you will never be able to do so without proper training. This training starts and ends within your own mind. You must develop a mindset that you will not be a victim, come to terms with the use of deadly force on another human, and if you carry a firearm know how to use it.

### **How to prepare – Are you able and willing to recognize a threat?**

Be alert and vigilant first. Become aware of your surroundings, identify areas with a high likelihood of violence and know your exits. The easiest solution is to simply stay away from dangerous venues or visit them during the day or during hours when criminal activity is at its lowest. Plan your route if you are traveling in or near dangerous areas. If you are not trained in close contact fighting or prepared to shoot someone, your best defense is just awareness of your surrounding and retreating immediately if you perceive a threat.

### **When Avoidance is Not an Option**

- Know where the exits are when you enter an establishment. If you need to leave the area, be ready.
- Know where your children or your group are and if you don’t know their location know how to contact them.
- Avoid groups of people being loud or confrontational.
- Try to blend in, don’t stand out.
- Consider carrying an individual first aid kit on your person or at least in your car.

These are just a few rules that are just a generalization. Each situation can and likely will be different.

### **Personal Crime and Assaults.**

Crime rates and statistics don’t matter when it happens to you or your loved ones. Once crime hits home your worldview changes and reality takes the place of ignorant bliss. All too often we wait until tragedy hits to decide to take the simple steps needed for basic personal security. We wait until a “breaking and entering” before installing a monitored home security system, wait to take a self-defense course until after we are assaulted, and wait until tragedy strikes before we decide not to be a victim. Change your mindset and you may change the target; criminals prey on the weak but your ability to defend yourself may be a strong deterrent for anyone who intends to perpetrate violence upon you. You cannot lose a fight if it is never started in the first place.

### **Awareness of a Threat and Your Ability to Defend Yourself Against it.**

While the noise from the alarm *may* deter the perpetrator and the camera will show evidence of the attack, it is important to remember the difference between detecting an intruder and defending yourself against an intruder. What plan do you have in place to respond to an alarm? Law enforcement response is different in every location and YOU are responsible for the safety of your family. If you are unwilling or unable to defend yourself against an intruder have you tested the average response time for your monitored security system and established a plan to run or retreat with your loved ones?

While these questions may make us feel uncomfortable it is important that we ask them and take personal responsibility for our own security at home as the first responder to any household threat. The most basic physical security precautions when implemented to make your home secure may be a strong deterrent for crimes of opportunity. Moreover, even the most basic response preparation and planning may help you when it counts the most. Here is one very simple question I often ask when providing security consultation: when was the last time you opened your windows, do you know how to open them, and can you escape out of a window to evade an attack? Most people have never opened the windows in their home and have no idea how to escape out a window and run to a neighbor. This is the simplest of points to determine if you are prepared for an attack and a simple indicator to inform yourself you need to get prepared.

### **Conclusion:**

First of all, enjoy life and enjoy all that is out in the world to see. Your right to defend yourself or not, is a choice that you are free to make. We are lucky to live in a country where you can choose to live in blissful ignorance thanks to the hard work and sacrifice of those who contribute to the defense of our country every day and others before them. Certainly nothing that you decide will ever change that, but blissful ignorance can't stop bullets and wishful thinking does not make you or your family any safer.

For those of us who are willing to answer these difficult questions and face these tough issues, even if you are not prepared to defend yourself because you recognize that you are simply unwilling and unable to inflict violence on a person, here are some words of wisdom to guide you: If you stay ready you never have to get ready. If you stay ready for terrorism and violence, then you never have to prepare for it.

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