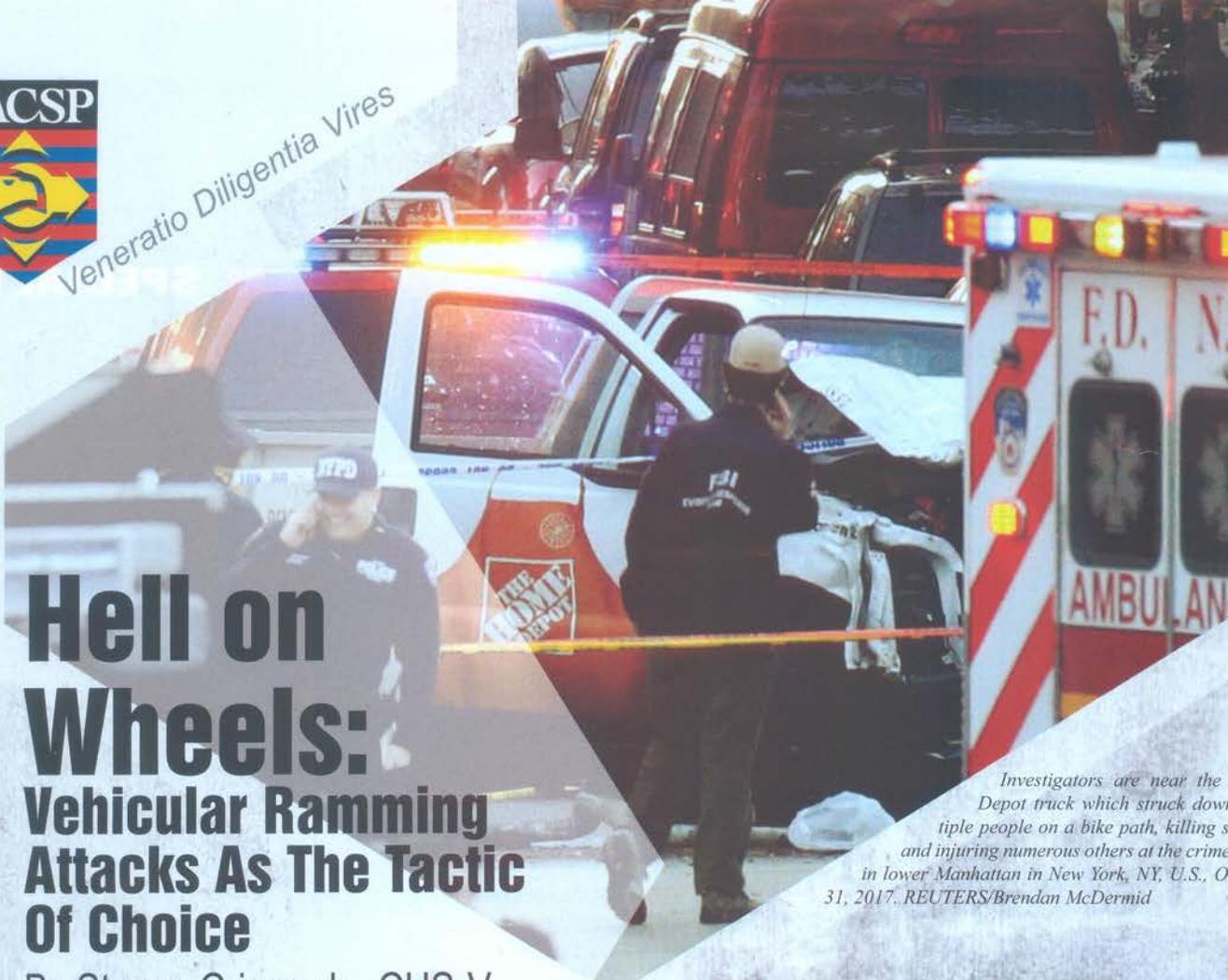




Veneratio Diligentia Vires



# Hell on Wheels: Vehicular Ramming Attacks As The Tactic Of Choice

By Steven Crimando, CHS-V

*Investigators are near the Home Depot truck which struck down multiple people on a bike path, killing several and injuring numerous others at the crime scene in lower Manhattan in New York, NY, U.S., October 31, 2017. REUTERS/Brendan McDermid*

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## ightmare on West Street

On Halloween, Tuesday October 31, a 29-year-old Uzbek national committed the first deadly terrorist attack in New York City since 9/11. Traveling at a high rate of speed in a rented Home Depot flatbed pickup truck, Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov executed a well-developed attack plan and pulled off Manhattan's West Side Highway (West Street) onto the scenic bike path that runs between the roadway and Hudson River waterfront. Plowing through the groups of pedestrians and cyclists for 17 blocks, Saipov left two dozen people covered in tire tracks and blood, ultimately killing 8 and seriously injuring 12 more. All of this unfolded in the late afternoon shadow of the Freedom Tower, with Ground Zero and the 9/11 memorial only blocks away.

Such attacks have dramatically increased in their frequency over the past three years. Salafi-Jihadi terrorists have increasingly employed vehicle ramming as a low-cost, low-tech weapon of mass destruction. At holiday celebrations in France and Germany, in crowded tourist areas in Spain and the UK, and on an ordinary day at Ohio State University...

The attack, which Saipov later disclosed to police from his hospital bed, had been several weeks in the making. It was cut short when he collided with an occupied school bus, injuring several on board. Exiting the vehicle while shouting "Allahu akbar," he began waving two handguns, (later found to be a pellet gun and a paintball gun). Saipov was shot and wounded by the police, arrested and transported to a city hospital. Notes later found in the truck, along with statements made to the police, indicated that he planned to continue mowing down pedestrians along a much longer route that would have taken him onto the Brooklyn Bridge. New York City Police Department (NYPD) Deputy Police Commissioner for Intelligence and Counterterrorism, John Miller said in a press briefing that the attack was carried out in the name of ISIS and that the Saipov "followed almost to a T, the instructions that ISIS has put out on its social media channels before with instructions to their followers on how to carry out such an attack." Days after the attack, ISIS pronounced Saipov a "soldier of the caliphate," its weekly newspaper.

### The Tactic of Choice

Since motor vehicles are ubiquitous and people are generally comfortable around them it can be difficult to fully appreciate the incredibly destructive nature of vehicular attacks and their capacity for creating mass casualty events. Vehicular Terrorist Attacks (VTAs), also referred to as vehicle-ramming attacks, are those instances of mass violence in which a perpetrator deliberately rams a motor vehicle into a building or crowd of people. Vehicles have also been used by attackers to breach

security around buildings with locked gates when initiating bombing and/or shooting incidents. This tactic is certainly not new and examples of vehicular attacks date back at least to the early 1970's.

Such attacks have dramatically increased in their frequency over the past three years. Salafi-Jihadi terrorists have increasingly employed vehicle ramming as a low-cost, low-tech weapon of mass destruction. At holiday celebrations in France and Germany, in crowded tourist areas in Spain and the UK, and on an ordinary day at Ohio State University, violent extremists have used cars and trucks to plow into unsuspecting crowds, in several instances following on with knives or firearms to inflict even more carnage. Crowds at large public gatherings and popular outdoor venues are soft, target rich environments.

From 2014 through October 31 of this year there were 23 terrorist vehicle ramming attacks, resulting in 204 deaths and 861 injuries. They also include the numbers of killed or injured in the vehicle assault in Charlottesville, Virginia in August targeting counter-protesters at a white nationalist rally; an incident U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions said met the definition of domestic terrorism. In May, a man driving in New York's Times Square plowed into a crowd during lunchtime, killing one person and injuring 22. While authorities said the incident was not terrorism, the Islamic State, inspired by the crash, used it to warn that more attacks on the nation's largest city and popular tourist destinations would follow.

Although vehicular ramming attacks represent only a small fraction of the overall number of casualties from terrorist attacks worldwide, the ease of execution combined with the difficulty in detecting or deterring such attacks has made this attack method a particularly challenging problem for the law enforcement and intelligence communities. In May, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) issued an unclassified report, "Vehicle Ramming Attacks: Threat Landscape, Indicators, and Countermeasures" providing guidance on detecting and deterring vehicular assaults. The report warned that, "No community, large or small, rural or urban, is immune to attacks of this kind by organized or 'lone wolf' terrorists," and that locations particularly vulnerable are those with "large numbers of people congregate, including parades and other celebratory gatherings, sporting events, entertainment venues, or shopping centers."

### Strategic Aspects of Vehicular Terrorist Attacks

The strategic objectives of terrorism include creating the maximum degree of social, economic and psychological disruption. Attacks at large public gatherings using weapons as common and accessible as cars and trucks can have a very chilling effect on the population. Such attacks disrupt public celebrations that foster community cohesion and national unity. They can deter shoppers, sports fans and concert-goers, as well as others who become fearful of public settings producing serious societal and economic consequences.



From the terrorist's perspective, creating a fear of people simply coming together in large public gatherings plays well into an overarching strategy to change the national

character of their enemies, create a climate of fear and distrust, and force the population and its leaders to become increasingly divided in their opinions regarding the level of risk and appropriate options for response. The true weapon of terror, of course, is fear, but more specifically ambient fear that is always operating in the background. When every car or truck on the street can potentially be used as a weapon, and every public gathering viewed as a target, the pervasive and constant fear that ensues aligns well with the terrorist's agenda.

### The Terrorist's Playbook

Immediately following the shooting incident in Orlando in June 2016, considered the deadliest terrorist attack in the U.S. since 9/11, Al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) published a special edition of their online magazine, Inspire, as an operational guide urging true believers to carry out more attacks against the general population in America, specifically targeting large public gatherings. Shortly after, the ISIS urged followers to wage vehicle attacks on the West in three issues of Rumiya magazine released in October, November, and December 2016, providing detailed tactical guidance for vehicle ramming and knife attacks in a series of installments titled "Just Terror Tactics." Subsequent AQAP publications provided further guidance about which types of vehicles would be most effective. One issue featured a glossy, full-page photograph of a Ford F-350 pickup under a banner headline calling the truck "the ultimate mowing machine."

Motor vehicles are easy enough to own, rent, borrow or steal. Accessing a vehicle does not raise the same red flags as attempting to acquire firearms or bomb-building materials. The 2012 FBI report, "Terrorist Use of Vehicle Ramming Tactics," suggests that the skill level necessary to execute a successful vehicle attack is extremely low compared to an operation using firearms and/or explosives. Vehicles can be moved around easily without suspicion. No specialized training or covert financing is needed to plan and conduct an effective



**Target Acquisition: The publications suggest the identification of crowded areas, such as festivals, parades and outdoor markets, and explains that attacks against civilian targets are more devastating and strategically useful than government or military targets. Locations where there are a maximum number of pedestrians and with the fewest vehicles are thought to be ideal. Like mass shooting attacks, locations that are both populated and confined, where victims have limited opportunity to flee or would cause a stampede injuring others while trying to flee, are also desirable.**

vehicle attack which may yield a similar casualty count as a more complex and costly bombing or shooting attack. There is an extremely low threshold for conducting a devastating vehicular attack, and terrorists now have a well-developed template for planning and executing such assaults referred to as the "playbook."

The tactical plan promoted by both ISIS and al Qaeda is both simple and deadly. It requires no permissions, funding or communication with the organizations' core leadership. True believers are encouraged to formulate and execute these plans independently employing the following action steps:

1. **Target Acquisition:** The publications suggest the identification of crowded areas, such as festivals, parades and outdoor markets, and explains that attacks against civilian targets are more devastating and strategically useful than government or military targets. Locations where there are a maximum number of pedestrians and with the fewest vehicles are thought to be ideal. Like mass shooting attacks, locations that are both populated and confined, where victims have limited opportunity to flee or would cause a stampede injuring others while trying to flee, are also desirable.
2. **Timing:** The magazines also suggested that attacks be timed in conjunction with important anniversaries and symbolic events in order to maximize their psychosocial impact. Those events or gatherings associated with holidays with religious or patriotic symbolism are especially valuable.
3. **Vehicle Acquisition:** The publications suggested that the attacker buy, rent, borrow, or steal a truck rather than a car. At least one article provided specific recommendations for certain models of large, heavy trucks that would still be easy to maneuver in crowded or tight spaces.
4. **Secondary Weapons:** Rumiya and Inspire both encouraged the use of secondary weapons, specially a knife or firearm to continue the attack when the vehicle is stopped. Great detail has been provided in selecting the best type of knife for an attack, as well as how to most effectively strike with an edged weapon and which areas of the victims' bodies were the most lethal targets. The use of secondary weapons not only

increased the scope of the attack, but would likely draw fire from responding police or military personnel, ensuring martyrdom.

5. **Martyrdom:** An Inspire article dating back to 2010 directed that vehicle ramming attacks should be martyrdom operations and directed attackers to continue fighting to their death. Surrender or capture were unacceptable outcomes and missions ending without martyrdom were likely to be considered failures.
6. **Allegiance:** Both ISIS and al Qaeda have instructed their followers to make sure that their allegiance to the groups was clearly known through pronouncements and written notes left behind and/or thrown from the vehicle during the attack. An issue of Rumiya specifically instructed that the phrase "The Islamic State will remain!" be used to reinforce the attacker's allegiance and to promote the image of an enduring Caliphate.

## Protecting the Public from Vehicular Terrorist Attacks

The increasing use of vehicles as a weapon in terrorist attacks presents a daunting challenge for policy makers and others tasked with protecting the public. Such attacks are nearly impossible to prevent, since anyone with access to a truck or car can turn it on a crowd of unsuspecting civilians.

## Defense against Vehicular Attacks

Like active shooters, terrorists using vehicles as weapons choose soft targets, such as those filled with carefree tourists. Vehicle attacks can be executed spontaneously, and planned attacks may not provide many pre-incident indicators useful to law enforcement or intelligence analysts. Early detection of terrorists on the pathway to a vehicle attack may be impossible in open societies. A VTA is very difficult, and possibly the most difficult type of terrorist attack for law enforcement to prevent and protect the public from.

A combination of both active and passive defense measures may be necessary to mitigate this risk, but not necessarily prevent attempts at vehicular attacks. Passive measures include installing barriers and buffers that would prevent a crowd strike,



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whether purposeful or accidental. These include both passive and operable barriers:

- **Fencing:** Construction fencing may slow but not necessarily stop a hostile vehicle from reaching pedestrians, but can provide buffer keeping pedestrians further from likely strike zones.
- **Vehicles:** Large construction or public works vehicles, such as dump trucks loaded with sand or stone, can be used for road closures in the areas around large events or along parade routes. The use of vehicles creates a flexible options that can be quickly deployed or redeployed as needed.
- **Stationary Barriers:** There are several types of stationary barriers and the selection of the most effective type must be based on several factors requiring a thorough evaluation of the perceived risk. Walls, permanent bollards, and other architectural features can be designed to work with the environment to reduce the possibility of vehicle/pedestrian contact.
- **Moveable Barriers:** Jersey Barriers are an example of moveable barriers. Made of concrete the barriers standing 2.6 to 3.5 feet tall are designed to prevent vehicles from crossing into oncoming traffic to prevent or reduce the damage done in highway crashes. They are easy to construct, position/reposition, and been effectively used for anti-terrorism purposes. Large moveable bollards ranging in form from concrete blocks to large, heavy decorative planters also can be effective countermeasures.
- **Operable Barriers:** Wedge and beam barricades, raised and lowered by electrical or hydraulic power are more complicate, expensive and require more maintenance than stationary barriers. They are used more often for facility protection than to protect special events or temporary crowds.

Active measures are most effective when used in concert with passive measures. Active measure involve technical surveillance of high risk areas by a combination of commercial, public and law CCTV and security video from commercial, public and law enforcement sources, along with direct action.

**Surveillance:** Monitoring the environment before, during and after an incident



through a variety of means helps provide the situational awareness necessary to detect any useful indicators of an ATA. This includes:

- **Pre-incident Surveillance:** Useful for hostile surveillance detection, reconnaissance of potential target areas and potential rehearsals or dry runs of threat activity.
- **Incident Surveillance:** Important to real-time situational awareness for law enforcement and first responder deployment and response to a dynamic event.
- **Post-incident:** Critical to the identification of the suspect, crime scene reconstruction, and the defensibility of law enforcement officer response, as well as providing meaningful evidence in the instance of a criminal prosecution if the perpetrator survives.

### **Direct Action**

Law enforcement and security forces should plan and train to stop a VTA in progress, even though that may prove difficult. Following the attack in Nice, France which killed 86 pedestrians leaving a Bastille Day fireworks display, NYPD amended their policy and procedures allowing officers to fire into a moving vehicle in the instance of a ramming attack. Responding officers must keep in mind that they are facing a determined adversary willing to die (likely seeking to die) in a deadly force encounter. To date, most VTAs have involved only one occupant, the driver, in the vehicle. Officers engaging the vehicle and/or its operator must consider the possibility of additional hostile passengers, explosives or other hazardous materials, such as radiological or chemical agents onboard. Officers must also recognize when firing into a moving vehicle that even if the operator is neutralized, the vehicle may continue for some distance into a crowd with before finally coming to rest. Even with the vehicle stopped and the driver apparently killed, approaching officers should anticipate the possibility of a secondary attack using an IED triggered remotely by others in an operational cell.

### **Personal Safety and Survival Strategies**

Unlike the active shooter risk, there has not been significant information campaign by homeland security and law enforce-



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ment officials to inform the public about the critical action steps recommended to improve the odds of survival in a vehicle ramming attack.

While many people have some familiarity with the basic “Run, Hide, Fight” and variants of that model of active shooter response, very few have any idea of what they would do if caught up in a terrorist vehicle attack while outdoors in a crowded environment. It has become increasingly important that the public under the growing risk of vehicular terrorist attacks, as well as strategies and tactics to recognize avoid and survive what has become the terrorists’ current attack method of choice.

Efforts to inform civilians about how best to improve their personal safety at large outdoor public gatherings or crowded areas should include action steps recommended for before, during and after a VTA. The perpetrators of mass violence are not individuals who just “snapped,” in fact in many instances they have not been individuals at all, but rather teams or cells who have engaged in significant pre-operational planning and preparation. Anyone responsible for bringing their family or a group to a large public gathering should also engage in planning, reconnaissance and onsite situational awareness.

Applying a Red Team\* mindset to large gatherings can give you a significant advantage in the event of a vehicular attack. While not at the same depth as the type of advance work done for executive or public figure protection, thinking the situation through from the bad guys’ perspective can help event-goers stay off of the “X”] (i.e., point of impact) or a least move quickly toward safety in the event of a vehicle attack. Of course, the safest way to stay off the “X” is simply to avoid the types of places or events that would be attractive to attackers. That is not always possible or desirable, and in a sense, the terrorists win if we change our way of life in response to the threat of violence.

### **Pre-Event Planning**

The location of most large public gatherings is typically known well in advance of the actual event date, as are the details of permanent, popular tourist locations. Spontaneous gatherings are less likely to



be targeted since the attackers have been deprived of any lead time for planning or preparation. The hostile actor knowing this often takes advantage of the time before planned gatherings to conduct their own reconnaissance and operational planning. Their focus is on identifying:

- Peak times when the greatest numbers of people will be gathered.
- Likely security or law enforcement posts or checkpoints.
- Sections of roadway where the driver can build up speed before veering into a crowd.
- The locations of barriers and bollards.
- Areas that afford victims few routes of escape.
- Choke points that will allow passage of their vehicle but cause panicked flight and potentially dangerous escape mobs or stampedes.

Improving personal safety and survivability means applying a similar mindset and taking the time to do some research. Situational awareness is essential and involves efforts to identify both risks and resources ahead of time. Risks, of course, are those things that will likely be problems or that may sources of danger. Resources are the people, places and things that might be helpful if the going gets tough. Remembering that people don't do their best thinking during moments of terror, having a plan in mind ahead of time and engaging in mental rehearsal for crisis response can make a big difference if things go wrong.

Before attending large public gatherings, individuals and families may consider:

- Finding and reviewing event maps or routes, even if this is done via online maps or Google Earth.
- Visiting the location prior to the event if it is reasonably nearby, just to get the lay of the land.
- Identifying choke points that would restrict rapid movement out of the threat environment.
- Bringing with them only what they will really need for safety and comfort so there is less to carry or manage if it becomes necessary move quickly through a crowd.
- Carrying a pocket-sized Individual



**Since it is possible that friends, families or colleagues may be separated during the initial crowd reaction, it is also important to pre-determine reunification spots. Try to envision the natural lines of drift, that is to say, the likely direction or pathways you think most people in the crowd might take to flee an attack, and establish your primary and secondary reunification points slightly outside of those high-volume routes.**

First Aid Kit (IFAK) for self-care and care of others.

- Having a frank discussion with those in a group attending an event to develop contingency plans for communications and reunification.

When an emergency occurs in a large crowd it is foreseeable that nearby cell towers and local phone circuits may be overwhelmed with volume. Texting may be a reasonable Plan B since SMS operates on different channels than voice communications, and often is still available when voice is not. Understanding that separation from loved ones is the greatest source of anxiety during a crisis, having backup communications plan is essential.

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### **During the Event**

While everyone may be excited to get a front row spot to view a passing parade or be near the action at a special event, in ramming attacks, those along the curb line are often the most vulnerable. Individuals should consider their position in large street gatherings or on crowded sidewalks in busy urban environments that may be susceptible to a vehicular attacks. Some basic countermeasures include:

- Avoiding the center or densest parts of the crowd; trying to stay on the fringe to allow options for movement.
- Selecting a location (or locations if mo-

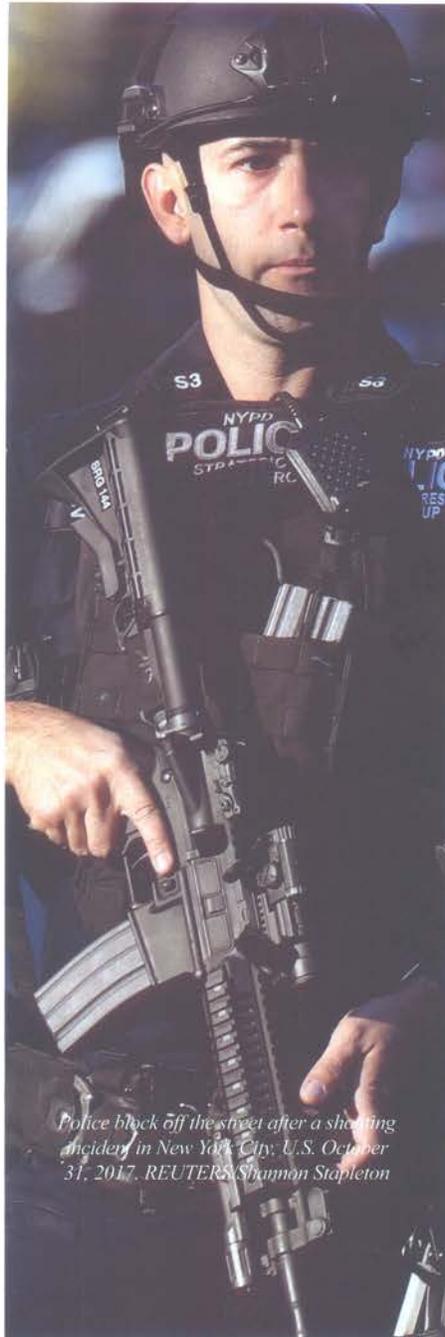
bile) based on safety, not convenience or simply having a great view.

- Taking a position near a street corner rather than the middle of the block. This will allow for more avenues of retreat if side streets are accessible.
- Not taking a position against walls, doors or other immovable objects one could be pinned against. Being hit and being crushed by a fast-moving vehicle will likely produce different physical consequences; allow some space when near any solid surfaces.
- Avoiding standing on, under or around temporary structures like stages or viewing platforms. If struck by a hostile vehicle, the collapse of those structures and the people falling from them represents another source of danger.

Event organizers, police and security forces often erect heavy barriers or bollards to reduce the risk of pedestrian-vehicle contact. If such barriers are in place, individuals should take advantage and use them as protection. If they are heavy and solid, they may provide good cover and concealment from the vehicle attack, as well as shots fired by the attacker and/or the responding police. Attackers will be looking out for these barriers as well, simply to avoid them when seeking a path of least resistance and maximum impact.

In addition to scouting out sources for cover and concealment, such as concrete walls or large trees, individuals should look for places of refuge, such as open stores or allies that they can duck into as the hostile vehicle or frantic crowd passes by. It is important to make sure that such places have alternative exits. It would be dangerous to be trapped in a dead-end ally if others also pack into the same confined space. In mass gathering scenarios, dead ends result in deaths from crowd crush or compressional asphyxiation.

While enjoying the event, it is important to keep a high level of awareness and attention on the roads for any vehicle moving erratically or not keeping with the normal traffic pattern. If an erratically-moving vehicle veers towards the crowd, it is helpful to remember that in a crisis, one should not simply run from danger, but instead run purposefully towards safety. This is when pre-event reconnaissance and a preparedness mindset will really pay off.



*Police block off the street after a shooting incident in New York City, U.S. October 31, 2017. REUTERS/Shannon Stapleton*

The attacker has likely anticipated the movement of a terrified crowd. Running with the crowd can get people into even deeper trouble. Keeping in mind those people, places and things previously identified as sources of safety, and while stay calming, and focused, move quickly toward those points of safety.

### **Immediate Post-incident Response**

The perpetrators of all forms of mass violence employ the time-tested principles surprise, speed and violence of action. Just as active shooter incidents begin and end

quickly, so do vehicular attacks. Survivors often report that the car or truck used in the attack seemed to appear out of nowhere, plow through the crowd, and speed onward in its path of destruction all in the blink of an eye. While the action steps recommended in during the event are intended to stop the killing, the steps recommended in the immediate aftermath of a vehicular attack are meant to stop the dying.

Once the vehicle has stopped, those nearby should not try to be a hero and approach the vehicle or try to engage the attacker. Anyone near where the attack vehicle has come to rest should move away. It is quite possible that the perpetrator can exit the vehicle and continue the attack with firearms and/or edged weapons. There is always the possibility that there are multiple attackers in the vehicle, or explosives and other harmful materials. The immediate priority should be safety and survival. Using their best judgement in a high-stress situation, individuals should try to determine if it is safe enough initiate care for others who may have been injured or put distance between themselves and the impact zone.

Bystander intervention can make a critical difference, but before initiating care for others, it is important make sure that it is safe to do so. Those on scene should take a moment to do a quick but thorough self-examination for any injuries. There are many examples of people who have been unaware of injuries which were masked by the powerful opioid response that accompanies our innate physiological fight or flight response. The physical numbness and emotional shock produced by neurochemicals and neurohormones triggered by a deadly force scenario can make victims oblivious to pain, or possibly life-threatening injuries. There are some reasonable assumptions regarding the impact zone that should guide initial post-attack action steps. These include the assumptions that there will likely be:

- Chaos, confusion and panic, characterized in some instances by irrational fight and flight by the crowd.
- Multiple, if not potentially overwhelming numbers of casualties.
- Injuries ranging in severity from mild to catastrophic. Some may be extremely graphic or gruesome adding to the traumatizing effects of the attack.



• Some injuries may involve the loss of limbs; many will result in severe bleeding.

Individuals with severe blood loss can die within minutes without intervention. Bleeding control

(B-CON) will be a high-priority. No matter how quickly professional emergency responders arrive, bystanders will always be first on the scene. Bystanders can initiate critical bleeding control and save lives by acting quickly and decisively. Given the steady increase over time of active shooter and vehicular attacks, civilians are no longer encouraged to learn about the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) "Stop the Bleed" campaign. This nationwide program seeks to empower citizens to act quickly and save lives in bleeding emergencies regardless of the cause. While not a purposeful vehicular attack, the scenario depicted in the short video at the DHS website, "A Perfect Stranger" illustrates the basic concepts very well.

The Stop the Bleed program promotes the use of three basic skills after calling 911 and if possible, moving a wounded person to safety:

- Apply firm, steady direct pressure to the general wound site with both hands if possible,
- Expose the wound and apply firm, steady pressure with a bandage or cloth to the precise site of the bleeding injury,
- If the bleeding doesn't stop, place a tourniquet 2-3 inches above the wound between the injury site and the torso.
- Tourniquets can be improvised, but given that shooting, bombing and vehicle attacks seem to be here to stay, it is an excellent idea for those going into crowd environments to have a small, simple B-CON kit with a proper tourniquet, as well as receiving some basic training in using bandages and tourniquets. Such gear is compact and relatively inexpensive and B-CON training is increasingly offered in communities around the country.

## Rapid Psychological Trauma Support

Compounding the medical trauma in a vehicular attack is the psychological trauma of facing a real-life threat and possibly witnessing others being injured or killed. The reaction of people exposed to overwhelming psychological stress can make a bad situation worse. For both clinical and tactical reasons, it will be important to begin managing the psychological trauma associated with a vehicular attack immediately, even while medical care is being rendered. Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed approach for assisting victims and witnesses in the immediate aftermath of disaster and act of

terrorism. It is intended to be used in the 0-48 of a violent or threatening event to help reduce the physical and emotional arousal (stress response) that can lead to more harmful (frantic, unfocused) behaviors and potential long-term mental health consequences.

PFA is an "every person" skills set. Just as one does not have to be a doctor, nurse or EMT to use basic medical first aid, it is not necessary to be a mental health professional to use PFA. It is intended to be used by whoever is first on the scene to initiate basic psychological support and help stabilize the emotional response to the situation. Managing acute stress reactions in the midst of a crisis is another critical task for bystanders. While there is a significant national effort underway to promote Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) it is important for planners and leaders to be aware that Psychological First Aid and Mental Health First Aid are not synonymous. Mental Health First Aid is intended for individuals who have or who may be developing a diagnosable mental health disorder. In that model of support, participants learn about the major categories of mental illnesses, the signs and symptoms of those mental illnesses, ways to assist someone in a mental health crisis, as well as how to connect individuals in a mental health crisis with the appropriate resources. Mental Health First Aid is not intended to be used in the immediate wake of traumatic event; Psychological First Aid is and would be necessary and important in the immediate wake of a vehicular attack.

It is also important for bystanders to remember that the post-attack environment is a crime scene where the preservation of evidence is critical. Nothing should be moved that does not need to be moved, and certainly nothing should be removed from the scene. Witnesses should wait until they have touched base with law enforcement personnel and other first responders before simply leaving the area. It is likely that they will want statements from those who were in the epicenter of the attack. Witnesses should also avoid speaking with the media if possible; something said to a reporter can affect the investigation or apprehension of others who may have been involved in the planning or execution of the attack.

## Public Events in the Era of Vehicular Attacks

As the Islamic State continues to lose territory in Iraq and Syria, the group will likely continue to strike at Western targets. While large-scale attacks are preferable, the group will settle for smaller attacks from inspired individuals to sustain a campaign of terror on innocent civilians. There is not an epidemic of vehicular attacks, but there is clear and convincing evidence that this type of mass violence is actively being promoted within terrorist organizations as an attack method

of choice. It is helpful to explore the tactical and strategic aspects of vehicular attacks when developing approaches to prevention and survival.

Unfortunately, the same dynamics that make large public events fun and exciting also make them attractive targets for terrorists and others who may wish to do harm. Being aware of the risks, engaging in pre-event planning and preparedness, and knowing how best to respond during and immediately following a vehicular attack can make participating in large public gatherings safer. It is important to stay sharp, have fun, and let's not let the allow terrorists to drive a wedge of fear any further into daily life than necessary.

Being aware of the risks, engaging in pre-event planning and preparedness, and knowing how to respond during and immediately following a vehicular terrorist attack can make participating in large public gatherings safer for all involved.

## About the Author

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