

# Mineta Transportation Institute



Brian Michael Jenkins  
Director

## PROTECTING SURFACE TRANSPORTATION AND OTHER SOFT TARGETS: CURRENT TRENDS CHALLENGE SECURITY

May 3, 2022

# THE THREAT IS CHANGING—

## TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM



- Threat posed by homegrown jihadists has diminished, but global enterprise survives—remains resilient and adaptive
- Domestic extremists currently viewed as greater threat

# THE THREAT IS CHANGING—

## TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY TERRORISM



- **Far right terrorists more lethal--White supremacists traditionally target government and minorities at places of worship, minority schools, commercial sites**
- **Remote recruiting produces more self-selecting (and often more troubled) attackers with limited resources—attacks more random**
- **Trend toward untethered terrorism—violence on behalf of personal agendas and recognition**

# THE THREAT IS CHANGING —

## MASS SHOOTINGS CONTINUE TO RISE



- Using original FBI criterion of 4 dead, mass shootings in the U.S. doubled between 2002 and 2021 from an average 3 to 6 a year
- Lethality increased from 5.3 to 9.5 fatalities per attack
- Only 6 had a nexus to terrorism—bigger problem is lone shooter acting for (often unknown) personal reasons

# THE THREAT IS CHANGING—

## GROWING ANTI-SOCIAL AGGRESSION



- Growing number of random attacks unconnected with ordinary crime or extremist ideologies
- People are being punched, stabbed, pushed off subway platforms, have chemicals thrown in their face, or suffer other forms of assault
- Attacks often occur on buses, trains or in stations while unruly passengers represent a growing problem for the airlines

# THE THREAT IS CHANGING—

## GROWING ANTI-SOCIAL AGGRESSION



- Venues are places where strangers come together and defined perimeters in which incidents are counted
- Part of a broader societal trend
- Pandemic blamed, but trend preceded COVID-19, however, pandemic could have long-term psychological effects on people's behavior

# **MOST TERRORIST ATTACKS ARE UNSOPHISTICATED**



- **Indicators of sophistication include inside information, sophisticated devices, penetration of active security measures, or simultaneous attacks against multiple targets**
- **Only 3.2% of 346 terrorist attacks in economically-advanced countries met one and only 1.2% met two criteria**
- **Remote recruiting and self-selection have led to even less sophisticated attacks on soft targets**

# SECURITY NOT A PERIMETER BUT RATHER AN ARRAY OF MEASURES



- **Deterrence**—theoretically works, but less effective against most determined or mentally-impaired attackers
- **Dissuasion**—programs aimed at identifying persons of concern and intervening to prevent radicalization
- **Destruction of terrorist groups** and measures aimed at degrading capabilities to carry out attacks
- **Detection and disruption of plots**—intelligence operations detected and thwarted more than 80% of homegrown jihadist terrorist plots.



# SECURITY NOT A PERIMETER BUT

## RATHER AN ARRAY OF MEASURES



- Enlisting public participation—“See Something—Say Something” works-- reports of suspicious behavior or objects by staff, passengers, and others prevented 11% of terrorist attacks (14.2% in advanced economies) and disarm 20% of terrorist bombs.
- Behavioral detection—detecting suspicious behavior, hostile intentions, controversial; CAPPS identified 10 of 19 hijackers on 9/11, but less applicable to other venues
- Physical security measures are last line of defense and the most costly—deter attacks rather than catch terrorists but terrorists take seriously

# CURRENT TRENDS POSE NEW SECURITY

## CHALLENGES



- Evolution from terrorist organizations to lone attackers, untethered terrorists, random mass shooters, and anti-social violence, makes intelligence collection more difficult and harder to identify persons of concern
- Shift from homegrown jihadists to domestic terrorists may also mean less latitude for intelligence collection
- Ability to intervene upstream to prevent radicalization and uncover plots will decline, shifting focus to physical security and rapid response

# DOES PHYSICAL WORK?

## IT'S **HARD** TO MEASURE

- Terrorist events statistically rare and random, making it difficult to empirically measure the effects of security measures...
- However, effects can be seen over the long run
- Effectiveness of security cannot be measured against what-- after an attack--people think security should be



# DOES PHYSICAL WORK?

## IT'S **HARD** TO MEASURE



- Primary purpose of terrorism is to create fear—material measures of security effectiveness not always relevant
- A terrorist “success” not necessarily a security “failure” as most terrorist attacks aim at targets with little or no security
- Security “success” not necessarily a terrorist “failure”—still creates fear

# DOES PHYSICAL WORK?

## IT'S **HARD** TO MEASURE



- **Cost-benefit analysis useful, but cannot be sole basis for assessing security measures...**
- **Risk to the individuals from terrorism or mass shooters is so low that almost any expenditure on security hard to justify**
- **Higher volume of anti-social violence may be different story**
- **People are not seeking objective measures of their personal security, but want feelings of vulnerability to go away—that's a different criterion**



# Questions

Brian Michael Jenkins

[brian@brianmichaeljenkins.com](mailto:brian@brianmichaeljenkins.com)