

Lazy Terrorists and Local Councils

There are lessons for Australia from the attacks in Nice (2016) and Oklahoma City (1995). The lessons are not about the motive of the perpetrator or the type of attack or even the method of causing as much harm as possible in a short time. Rather, the lesson to be learnt from both of these attacks is that terrorists are human and therefore some are lazy.

Both attacks occurred in regional towns not major cities. Why? Because they were close to where the perpetrators lived and there was enough of a “target” there to make it attractive. In one case the target was a crowd celebrating a national day and in the other a federal building, both representing the enemy that needed to be attacked and damaged. In neither case was the attack going to cripple the country and bring about the desired social restructuring. But, in both cases the attacks did achieve mass casualties and more importantly international media attention, recriminations and investigations that make the authorities look at least inadequate and ineffective if not incompetent.

Timothy McVeigh (Oklahoma) and Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel (Nice) were both resident reasonably close to the cities they targeted. The point being that while there must be plans to protect the major cities, effort must also be put into protecting the other towns and cities.

Targets could include the ANZAC Day march, social gatherings, Centrelink Offices, Police Stations, Law courts, RSL, the local pub or CWA hall or any other site they think represents the “enemy”.

The challenge is that counter-terrorist planning, prevention and response now rests with the locals. Which is probably a combination of local police, if any still remain in the area given the closure of country stations, local site managers perhaps with some guidance from head office, and importantly local government. It is not suggested that every site have a dedicated anti-terrorist plan and an intelligence-led threat assessment. Rather, as part of an all hazards approach the planners consider the specific implications of such an act of deliberate human action by someone from the immediate or nearby community.

It is probable that the event will occur with no warning and the locals will suddenly be faced with mass casualties that will exceed the capability of the nearby hospitals and morgues. They will also have short and long term social disruption and dysfunction and national and probably international media attention.

There is a need for local councils to be actively involved and engaged in planning for such incidents. And, for the role and importance of local councils to be recognised.

Considerations include: how will a town deal with a large number of fatalities and injuries, what resources are immediately available, what are the command and control systems available and who is in charge until the bosses arrive from the big smoke.

The answers for a country town will be very different to the plans for the capital cities. The resources may include farm vehicles, local trucking companies, local council plant equipment or

their contractors. The command, control and communication systems may be those of the local volunteer fire brigade or community-based organisations. The authority may fall to the local town council or whoever steps forward on the day.

In all cases it would be better to have at least thought about what could be done rather than making it up on the day.

Nice and Oklahoma show us that anywhere is vulnerable so we shouldn't be surprised, we should be prepared.

Don Williams is a research associate of the ASRC and be contacted at donwilliams@dswconsulting.com.au