



THE INTEGRATED C-IED TRANSIT RESPONSE TEAM

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For those employed in any of the emergency service disciplines, it is an unfortunate fact that the 21st Century is fraught with perils and challenges that could never have been imagined even 20 years ago.

While there has always been an element of society prone to committing random acts of violence and a criminal sub-culture ready and willing to carry out domestic bombings, we are now just as likely to encounter acts of Jihadi-inspired terrorism, right-wing extremists and even the actions of 'lone wolf actors'.

Consider the alarming frequency of incidents involving active shooter/bombers, booby-trapped homes, coordinated ambush attacks against first responders, 'doomsday' events, elaborately prepared arson scenes, planned 'lone wolf' attacks, post-explosion hazards, acts of sabotage, experimentation with improvised explosives and chemical/biological devices and the discoveries of explosive

or incendiary caches. These actions are often the result of an adversary on the 'lunatic fringe', motivated and enraged by domestic issues or just acting out some evil fantasy.

Prudence, however, calls for us to remain alert to the increase in Jihadi-inspired plots that specifically mention the targeting of transit systems and the proliferation of transnational threats posed by radicalised homegrown extremists and foreign-trained 'gangsters'. This wide spectrum of potential and real threats requires an enhanced and flexible response capability on the part of all emergency service disciplines, one created with today's realities in mind. One that is just as adaptive and creative if not more so than our adversary. We cannot allow ourselves to become complacent or be caught off-guard.

If lessons learned from the past are any indication, the most comprehensive and common-sense solution to combating

Photo above:
LASD C-IED team taking cover during
live-fire training exercise at Los Angeles
subway station.

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the terrorist or criminal use of IEDs is to leverage all emergency response disciplines towards collaborative training, deployment and response protocols. Especially those tasked with protecting public transportation systems.

The heavy volume of passengers and relative ease of access makes public transportation systems a 'soft target' profile that remains vulnerable to anyone intent on creating panic and mayhem. Many such attacks have occurred; for instance, bombings, arson attacks and active shooter events, underscoring the need for vigilance amongst emergency response disciplines. Even as recently as February 2014, a bomb plot targeting the 'Los Angeles subway system' was foiled by the FBI.

With the protection of such a viable 'soft target' in mind and to counter a number of real and existing threats to the Southern California Rail Transportation System (SCRTS), the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department (LASD), the agency tasked with providing police protection throughout the SCRTS, developed a strategy designed to integrate elements of several independent specialist disciplines into one interdependent and scalable deployment package. The goal is to minimise disruption to the public and the transportation system while maintaining a high level of safety and professionalism.

The concept of integrated multi-discipline teams is not new. In the 1990s, with the spread of clandestine drug labs and the criminal activities of Mexican drug trafficking organisations, cross-disciplinary teams composed of narcotics detectives, criminalists, health professionals, hazardous materials specialists, dedicated prosecutors, child-welfare workers and intelligence analysts were trained and equipped to operate as 'task forces'. Each discipline provided a specialist skill that, when teamed with other relevant partners, proved invaluable to the overall mission of targeting clandestine drug labs and organisations. The very nature of these 'task forces' though, required a dramatic change in the way such teams were managed and operated. Despite the challenges, it worked. Today, with an increase in 'active shooter' events, the concept of 'integrating' teams is again being revisited so that paramedics and

rescue personnel learn to operate as an essential element in the 'active shooter-contact teams' format.

Countering any number of threats to the Los Angeles transportation systems, preparing for the 'spectacular' event, yet remaining flexible in the way we respond with as minimal disruption to the public as possible, became the genesis for the formation of a team whose role it was to transform themselves from their specialist 'day jobs' into an effective Counter-IED (C-IED) team and to do so rapidly and effectively.

Composed of specially trained and equipped law enforcement officers from a wide variety of unique disciplines, the LASD/FBI Integrated C-IED Transit Response Team was tasked with conducting and supporting all manner of C-IED missions; from the everyday 'suspicious package' call, to deliberately set fires, occasional acts of rail sabotage, post-blast investigations and of course, any activity consistent with the discovery of a suspect IED. The goal was to be as rapid and seamless as possible, while reducing the 'time to task' and remaining compliant with existing bomb disposal rules.

Establishing such a team was actually quite daunting, made even more so by teams with roles and responsibilities seemingly in contradiction with other disciplines. Salient adjustments were required due to an over-reliance on fancy gadgetry, a tendency towards learning sophisticated tactics and techniques that were actually in conflict with the fundamental skills required for conventional C-IED missions, 'old-school'- types unwilling to adapt to joint operations, and a general malaise of 'paralysis by analysis' that favored slow-footed reactions and an uninformed, yet well-intentioned transit hierarchy.

It seemed like a colossal undertaking, because it was. What has emerged after several years of training and rehearsing, is a joint operational plan that is remarkable in simplicity and an integrated C-IED team with multiple moving parts that is equally remarkable in both symmetry and speed.

The first task towards development of such a team concept, was to understand historical attacks on transit systems. Thanks to the expertly researched 'Database on Terrorist and Serious



Criminal Attacks Against Public Surface Transportation’ produced by the Mineta Transportation Institute, we were able to compare all manner of terrorist and criminal attacks against transportation systems worldwide. Then, we collaborated with our EOD and transit partners in the UK, Germany and Israel to find strategies and solutions, ‘proven in battle’, that would reduce the risk to our transportation system.

The Integrated C-IED Transit Response Team consists of four primary independent specialist disciplines providing a critical function, as listed below.

COUNTER-IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEVICE DETECTION DOG (C-IE3D) TEAM:

Perhaps our first tactical change was in the way our canine teams are trained, equipped and deployed. These sixteen Deputy Sheriffs are assigned throughout the system in small emergency vehicles, their role to respond rapidly to any incident or event involving an ‘unattended’ or ‘suspicious’ bag. The team underwent basic and advanced

Threat Assessment and IED/Incendiary Device recognition training until they met a level consistent with that maintained by our bomb technicians. It just seemed to make sense, primarily because their response time is always quite fast. The C-IE3D deputies have proven that their critical thinking and rapid decision-making skills make the officer the most vital part of the canine team – their furry partner relegated to tool status.

THREAT INTERDICTION UNIT (TIU):

The TIU is a twenty-four person unit of sergeants and deputy sheriffs, divided into three independently-deployed teams, each tasked with performing specialised patrol and detective functions throughout the transportation system. Their ‘day job’ consists of maintaining law and order, making arrests, conducting surveillance of suspicious behavior, and monitoring the activities of known or suspected criminals who make the mistake of riding buses or trains that day. Mobile search and screening teams and high-visibility saturation patrols at randomly-selected vulnerable points remain daily tasks for TIU. But what makes TIU rather

Two TIU scouts provide protective overwatch of LASD Bomb Squad officer at live-fire active shooter/bomber exercise.

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LASD Bomb Squad and TIU scout conducting joint C-IED operations at Los Angeles subway station.

unique is that while they are all certified emergency medical technicians, they also maintain an arsenal of mass casualty gear, special weapons, robots and surveillance equipment, are fluent in all nuances of the transportation system and can transform into their C-IED role at a moment's notice. They can conduct C-IED search missions and are equipped and trained to operate in both high threat and hazardous materials environments.

ARSON-EXPLOSIVES DETAIL (BOMB SQUAD):

The LASD/FBI Bomb Squad is made up of FBI-certified bomb technicians and fire investigators and five FBI Special Agent Bomb Technicians whose job is to respond to any incident involving the terrorist or criminal use of explosives or incendiary devices. Like all major metropolitan bomb squads, a full suite of equipment is at hand. To increase our response time throughout the rail system, we maintain a fleet of small emergency vehicles to augment our larger response trucks. All members of the squad are cross-trained in High Threat Disablement techniques which enables personnel to employ unconventional tools and tactics in the conduct of fast-attack render-safe options in a variety of scenarios when the use of more traditional tools and tactics is not appropriate.

HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DETAIL (HMD):

Consisting of three Deputy Sheriffs and two criminalists, the HMD responds to any incident involving the terrorist or criminal use of chemicals, suspected improvised explosives or radiation releases. More importantly, they serve as Site Safety Officers to any incident within the transportation system.

As we are all aware, not every 'suspicious' bag is a bomb. No matter where it is. Oftentimes, it is nothing more than a bag carelessly left behind. Common sense dictates that disrupting the public and closing down the transportation system for every such bag or event would be nothing more than a dramatic waste of time and effort. Therefore, when such a bag or package or event is reported, a combined element of one C-IE3D deputy and two TIU scouts are emergency dispatched. The C-IE3D 'Quarterback' is responsible for rendering a rapid, well- thought-out assessment and determining whether further investigation is warranted. His/ her assessments must be based on sound and practiced assessment criteria, using appropriate assessment tools in accordance with our own best practices. The TIU scouts provide protective overwatch, maintain communications with command personnel, establish safety cordons and take whatever actions the three-person team deems necessary.

Typically, the package or circumstance is assessed as non-threatening and the scene returns to normal in a matter of a few minutes. Disruption to the public, if at all, is minimal.

All such responses generate a brief notification to the Bomb Squad, which dispatches a two-bomb technician team immediately, even though most of the necessary information may be lacking. They, in turn, send a notification message to HMD and FBI, advising of the response. When canceled enroute, a cancel message is transmitted to HMD and FBI and everyone resumes normal operations. Notifications, response times and cancellations are meant to be brief.

However, in circumstances where a package or device has been assessed as 'investigation required', the Integrated C-IED Transit Response Team is deployed. The TIU scout-element summons additional team members then assumes command until the arrival of the Bomb Squad. In well-choreographed fashion, all members of the integrated team arrive with a mission to perform, operating with concurrent activity and always thinking one step ahead. C-IE3D and TIU personnel operate as small teams in either search, ground domination or overwatch roles. There is no tolerance for self-dispatching or irrelevant disciplines. As our UK colleagues say, 'Big Boy's Rules'.

Aiding our rapid deployment capability is a number of special purpose tactics.

First, from bomb disposal officers of the Israeli National Police we learned to develop our own 'EOD shorthand', a means of communicating EOD-related information through commonly-understood terminology while stressing the need for brevity, whether in person or via communication device. This is a skill that has paid off a number of times – eliminating confusion and miscommunication amongst the team while being completely foreign to anyone not 'in the business' who just happens to be listening.

Secondly, to manage the chaos and drama that always seems to occur at such scenes, we use a mapping tool (essentially a smartphone app) that tracks all relevant assets, maps the scene and provides real-time camera override. These images and short-hand messages can be transmitted, much like

a text message or an email, to anyone involved in the incident.

The command and control system we have found to be more suitable for these missions is a system in use throughout the UK known as the Bronze, Silver, Gold Command Structure. For us, it's appropriate.

And finally, to maintain our high level of readiness, once a year we conduct a week-long, around-the-clock live-fire exercise at transit venues. The exercise is based on real-world issues and is conducted and reviewed by our UK partners at EW-Solutions.

In short, our transit responses allow for critical assessments by a skilled C-IE3D team then, as appropriate, deploying well-planned, oft-rehearsed action plans that can be collapsed or expanded depending on the threat appreciation. It is this approach, coupled with our education of the transit workforce and close coordination with our secondary support elements that establish a logical and effective countermeasure for a variety of threats.

The overarching desire is to provide a professional service and minimise disruption to the public in an era of real and potential bombing threats to American mass transit systems. ■

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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