Indefensible Space
Terrorism: Securing Places or Protecting People?

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No matter the period, there are as many different types of target for terrorist attacks as there are attacks themselves: schools, as in Kiryat Shmona in 1974, Beslan, and Toulouse; concert halls, as at the Bataclan or in Manchester; nightclubs, as in Bali, Istanbul, and Orlando; airports—Tel Aviv in 1972, Rome, Orly, Algiers, Glasgow, Madrid, Moscow, and Brussels; metro, bus and train stations— Bologna in 1980, Paris, London, Madrid, Moscow, Montreal, Saint Petersburg, and so on; bars and hotels—Jerusalem, Bombay, Delhi, Mogadishu, Bamako, Sousse, Kabul, Baghdad, Tel Aviv, Paris, and so on; or shopping streets and supermarkets, in Omagh, Barcelona, and London.

With each attack, we discover once again how difficult it is to protect these targets, and concentrate on essentially static defensive measures. These are necessary, but they are insufficient. In this age of Twitter, we spend much of our time rediscovering; to a large degree, we have lost our sense of perspective and of detailed analysis. Many lessons that seem new to us are simply ones we have forgotten.

As emergencies and threat levels steadily rise, managing time and flows of people assumes the same importance as traditional security measures that typically impede and obstruct such flows. A state of emergency cannot be sustained over an extended period. The very idea is a contradiction. It is certainly necessary to reassure people by sending them the right message. But this should not stop us at the same time from beginning to fundamentally alter some essential concepts, and from moving beyond one-off responses.

The Limits of Defensible Space

One of the major theoretical questions in public safety concerns what is termed "situational prevention." In the early 1970s, the urban planners Oscar Newman and Jane Jacobs developed the concept of "defensible space." The idea was to design urban spaces so as to discourage crime and keep people from feeling unsafe. Even at that late stage, no one had recognized just how far living conditions had deteriorated; a culture of denial, along with a devotion to open spaces and to tearing down barriers, had stopped the hard debate about safety from taking place.

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Meanwhile, in the streets and in the cinema, it was the age of "legitimate self-defense." The real world and the world of urban planning no longer coincided.

Nonetheless, principles informing security measures in urban planning were drawn up. The separation between private and public space, the marking of different territories, height limits, new types of formal and informal surveillance, and the "natural" appropriation of space—all of these concepts derive from the work of Jacobs and Newman. The principles of situational prevention have largely guided the implementation of regulations in France, especially following law No. 95-73 of January 21, 1995 and Article L. 14-1 of the Urban Planning Code. Regulations that apply these principles are now being adapted to the emerging terrorist threat. Such regulations typically reinforce the defensible spaces in question: improving security at potential targets, using video surveillance to monitor access more closely, reinforcing buildings, etc.

But the notion of defensible space has lost some of its relevance. There are a number of reasons for this:

- **Methods for improving security** and discouraging attacks lose their effectiveness when scaled to meet the risks of attack from wartime weapons and methods. In times of peace, buildings and facilities are designed to withstand peacetime attacks.

- **Access control** makes sense only if spaces can be closed, and if a distinction can be drawn between the public inside and outside them—leaving the attackers on the outside, of course. But recent incidents have shown that attackers are, in many cases, already inside the space. In reality, checkpoints are only passages between two open spaces, and the same people are present both inside and outside. There remains the further problem of vast interconnecting spaces that resist any attempt to define particular spaces within them.

- **Means of identification**, particularly video surveillance, are crucial for post-event analyses, but play only a weak preventive role in modern terrorist attacks.

- **Extending deterrent measures** is ineffective against individuals whose intention is to die, and whose primary concern is solely that they might not injure or kill a sufficient number of people.

Finally, **natural surveillance**—that is, surveillance by citizens—only works when there is a clear framework aligning public action with individual situations. This is very rarely the case in the current situation. Indeed, the state's inability to regulate the threat level produces a degree of disengagement on the part of citizens. We must

also acknowledge that there are members of the public who are sympathetic to terrorist causes.

The succession of terrorist acts by the Islamic State—a group that is in no way innovative, but which has for the first time made use of the complete range of methods and agents available to such groups—leads us to question something we had taken for granted, bringing an end to the theory of defensible space. The sooner we grasp this, the sooner we can develop tools of resistance, rather than mere resilience.

Toward a Logic of Indefensible Space

Accepting the idea of indefensible space leads us to a new logic. Security measures no longer concentrate on static means of protecting a space, but on dynamic methods of protecting those within it.

Shortening the Timeframe

When an attack is in progress, time is no longer an ally but part of the danger. The first objective of any security organization should be to limit the number of potential victims by shortening the initial attack time, and then to evacuate people from exits unaffected by the attack, removing as many targets as possible from the path of the attackers.

This new requirement forces us to rethink our whole system of security measures. Most spaces open to the public—event spaces and commercial, professional, leisure, and cultural spaces—have increased their security measures in the wake of the Paris attacks on November 13, 2015. But security personnel have not established procedures that are very different from those in force prior to the attacks. Their methods of intervention have not changed; most would hardly know what to do if they detected something more dangerous than nail scissors.

Even today, the bulk of security measures are concentrated on prevention, with a smaller focus on detection. If there is no supervisor at the screening points at the entrances to these sites, or if they lack means of communication, clear procedures, and rapid reinforcements, these measures will not effectively spread the alarm. (And, of course, if the guards are attacked, they will be unable to raise the alarm.) This increases response times and, in particular, increases the length of time taken to evacuate the site.

Redefining Security Checks

We must therefore redefine the ways in which individuals are checked. Checkpoints must be seen as a way to quickly detect suspicious or threatening behavior rather than preventing attackers from entering the site.

Security checkpoints should be thought of as secure points where one can confront potential attackers. Ideally, there should be forces capable of reacting

immediately at each such point. Their location should be determined by the means of protection (concrete barriers, stone blocks, etc.) and of evacuation (side passages, emergency exits, etc.) immediately available nearby. The number of these should be increased. The important thing is to limit crowding in front of the checkpoint, even if it means reducing the number of checks. The large number of open entrances to the Stade de France functioned well in the period prior to November 13, but reducing their number after the attacks has only been confusing and dangerous for the crowds gathered in the open external space.

Introducing Random Checks

One cannot protect all open spaces—streets, for instance—all the time. And, if one cannot be present everywhere, one must work in a mobile, random way. Recent terrorist acts show a mixture of preparation and improvisation. Random checks can disrupt such acts far better than fixed checkpoints. This is particularly true in the preparatory phases of these attacks, but also in moments of improvisation where they meet opposition they had hoped to avoid. Such random checks must be reinforced with techniques for coordinated armed patrols, and must have a way of communicating any alerts. Using agents specially trained to pick out individuals improves the effectiveness of such methods. Despite common criticisms, random checks do not represent a security failure. They are a positive force, as long as they are conceived of as such, and as long as they are tied into a system of checkpoints.

Evacuations during Attacks

The logic that drives the actions of public security forces often resembles that of firefighters. The police must prevent criminal acts, whilst firefighters make every effort to save as many lives as possible. In the case of a terrorist attack, these two groups work together to evacuate as many people as possible quickly and safely. It is generally not possible in such contexts to contain the targeted groups, because:

- These spaces are not designed to offer protection to those inside them.

- The officers in charge of containing the crowd will themselves be tempted to escape.

- A panicked crowd must be able to evacuate. If not, loss of life is inevitable, as in the case of Heysel stadium.

- No-one who manages a private space is competent or able to make the decision to confine the public within a space that has come under threat—for instance, by closing its doors.

Individual Adaptations to Indefensible Spaces

Adapting individual behavior relies on awareness of the security systems in use in indefensible spaces. It is a matter of living with the terrorist threat, and recognizing that our living spaces are not, at present, defensible spaces. Everyone is responsible, in part, for their own safety.

The Active Citizen's Attention

Recognizing the concept of indefensible space should not make individuals feel unsafe, or make them fear an attack is inevitable. Instead, it should keep them alert in the face of possible incidents. Living with the threat of terrorism requires us to adapt how we behave in public spaces, even ones that seem safe. It is no longer possible to leave one's safety in the hands of security systems and professionals without taking some responsibility for it oneself. Without descending into paranoia, we must become more attentive to the environment.

This is a condition of survival.

Anticipating Possible Attacks

Beyond this attention to our environment, we must anticipate possible attacks, no matter where we are. Identify escape routes and emergency exits to the side or rear of the site, and use this knowledge when deciding where to situate yourself. Report anything unusual to a security guard. Cooperate with security measures and checks: the faster they are carried out, the more effective they are.

Reacting to an Attack

Official safety guidelines drawn up in France following the attacks of November 13, 2015 are, of course, full of good advice. In the first instance, running and hiding are crucial for survival. In a sense, what action we take afterwards is unimportant. Nonetheless, adapting to events is essential. Common sense says that one should try to get away from the source of the danger as quickly as possible—from the noise of shots or explosions or, in the case of more distant alarms, from the sound of shouting. In all cases, one must get out of the attackers' line of sight or fire by taking shelter behind something sturdy. It is better, then, to escape via side passages, and to use curved or zig-zagged routes. While panic is natural, the ability to continue observing and adapting to the situation is crucial for one's chance of survival.

Accepting the Situation

Finally, we must talk about acceptance of the event. Each attack brings its share of drama, of personal stories, of despair and hope. And each brings with it heroes who

save lives, provide shelter, fight attackers, and avoid dozens of casualties.

The victims of terrorist attacks are thrown into a universe of violence to which they do not belong and for which they are typically unprepared. Some will go beyond the guidelines of caution and self-preservation, choosing instead to fight. This is part of the acceptance of terrorist acts. There is no question of evaluating such actions: dead or alive, heroes are those who help save lives by placing themselves in danger. There are no good choices in such situations. Potentially, all will lead to further danger. But what would have happened if the Thalys passengers had fled instead of fighting? How many lives were saved on the Promenade des Anglais by the man who drove his scooter under the truck, making the vehicle slow and swerve? How many survivors owe their life to the policeman who shot the Bataclan attackers?

Of course, none of us know how we would react if faced with such an event. Those who underwent such experiences did not know how they would react. The state cannot demand heroism; ultimately, it can suggest only escape and survival. None of the measures we have described can be based on these exceptional individual reactions. But living with terrorism also means accepting the intrusion of war into some moment of our peaceful lives, as was the case this weekend in London.

We have learned to be vigilant.

We have become resilient.

It's now up to us to choose to resist.

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