



MUMBAI ATTACKS SECURITY BRIEFING

Interoperable Communications Lessons Learned

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By: Joe Mazzarella, Esq., Chief Legal Counsel, Mutualink, Inc.

While the precise details of the November 30, 2008 terrorist attack on Mumbai, India continue to emerge, there is enough information available to provide a portrait of events that can offer many valuable lessons for public safety and security leaders. We tread lightly to avoid any notion of opportunism, however, as dedicated public safety communications professionals, the Mumbai attacks reveal the fundamental importance that a real time, community-wide incident based emergency communications sharing platform can play in effective emergency preparedness and response.

Without reproducing the event timeline in detail, the operational signature of the Mumbai attacks provides important information that will assist in preparing for and responding to potentially similar events in the future. As history amply demonstrates, terrorist groups tend to copy and emulate methods that they deem to be successful. Law enforcement and security professionals should recognize that the "success" of the Mumbai operation will provide both a strategic and tactical template for others. The Mumbai attacks are the realization of a predicted security threat scenario – coordinated multi-site urban terror assaults.

In this attack, we note that a massive and multi-faceted emergency response effort unfolded. It included local police, anti-terrorism police units, military units, fire rescue, bomb detection units, medical response, port authority, traffic control, and railway and airport transportation authorities. We can only speculate about the level of cohesive and interoperable communications that existed, however, the response efforts as reported appear to have been chaotic and nominally coordinated. This condition reduced and impaired force effectiveness. It also is apparent that poor and/or delayed communication and information sharing limited situational awareness, response assessments and planning.

Based upon publicly available information, we make the following observations for future emergency preparedness and response planning efforts:



Indian Security forces respond to attacks.

Multiple Site Coordinated Attack – Coordinated urban attacks occurred at 10 separate locations, with 8 being within an approximately 4 mile area and the others occurring approximately 15 miles away near the Mumbai international airport. The effect and impact of the operation was catastrophic, spanned 3 days and paralyzed a major financial center with over 12 million people. Yet, it was carried out by a relatively small number of actors, consisting of an operational cell of 10 to possibly 18 people. Identifying that the singular attacks were part of an orchestrated whole took several hours.

Key Infrastructure and Community Assets Targeted – Key community assets were targeted or played important roles in the attacks. The targets appear to have been consciously chosen in advance of the operation. The assets were: Hospitals, Police Stations, Railways Stations, Airport Facilities, Port Facilities, Hotels, Cinemas, Cafés and Religious Sites.

Targeted Sites Served Multiple Reinforcing Objectives - The choice of sites provides valuable information in assessing the nature and type of facilities that may make attractive targets for future coordinated multi-site urban assaults. Specifically, we note the following:



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NRF, NIMS and NIPP contemplate in all hazards, all risks coordinated planning and response capability.

Police Stations - Public Safety Command and Control – Attacking this facility type slows down the security response apparatus and provided other actors time to execute their objectives in other locations. It should be noted that the Security Chief and other high ranking counter-terrorism officers were essentially targeted and assassinated. This tactic appears to have been designed to disrupt command and control, and hobble security response effectiveness.

Hotels – Hotels are emerging as high risk terrorism targets. Security personnel should be focusing on vulnerability assessments and preparedness and response plans.

Hotels, which are historically publicly open environments with a transient guest population, are emerging as preferred targets. The Mumbai hotel attacks were patterned off the success of an earlier Marriott Hotel attack in Karachi, Pakistan. However, interest in tourism related sites and hotels extend back much further, including the Bali hotel bombing in 2002.

The Mumbai Hotel attacks reveal a variety of valuable information and insights:

- 1. Symbolic Buildings.** The multiple hotel buildings that were targeted had a symbolic purpose from a historical and socio-political aspect.
- 2. Staging Points.** The hotels themselves were used as planning, staging and storage points for weapons caches in anticipation of the attack. Some the terrorists were guests.
- 3. Bottleneck Control.** Once the public access floor was under control, the remaining floors were effectively controlled and a mass hostage opportunity arose.
- 4. Identifying Friend from Foe.** External security personnel had a difficult time identifying the actual terrorists and clearing the hotels. Only a few video shots of terrorists' faces were shared through conventional electronic distribution means hours after the event unfolded.
- 5. Closed Circuit Video Feeds.** Closed circuit video feeds were limited and in most instances unmanned. Real time feeds could not be shared.
- 6. Layout Plans.** Hotel layout plans were not available for response teams. This lack of information undoubtedly hindered planning and delayed a tactical response effort.
- 7. Mass Communication.** Communications to hotel guests stranded and barricaded in their rooms were handled from within the hotel by hotel personnel over the telephone. Mass communication and updates could not be delivered through the system by outside responders.
- 8. Inside Intelligence.** Despite ongoing firefights, Hotel guests were actively texting and communicating with family members from mobile devices within the hotels. This represented a valuable intelligence information gathering opportunity that could have been leveraged and shared with responders.

Hospitals – Attacking these targets helped to further impair public safety response efforts and cause mass casualty response co-



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ordination to be more complicated. It also created psychological fear by attacking a facility which is universally accepted as a place of safety and care.

Airport Facilities – A taxi was blown up at one of the main roadways leading to the Mumbai International Airport. This tactic had the effect of creating a disproportionate resource response and diversion, because airports have received the lion's share of security focus due to their status as classic terrorism targets. Assaults on airport related facilities may be used in a diversionary fashion, particularly in urban areas that host nearby airports which rely upon local emergency response assets.

Cinemas and Cafés – These targets are attractive mass casualties' opportunities and create general mayhem. They instill immediate fear in the civilian population. In the United States, malls, cineplexes and similar predictable and routine gathering locations would be prime targets.

Ports – The use of water ports as a covert means of entering a targeted environment raises new concerns. Small vessels provide the ability to surreptitiously move material and men with a minimum of risk of detection by the general public. Cities with navigable water bodies that provide quick access to key parts of an urban environment should be aware of this vulnerability.

Railway Stations – Railway stations provide large masses of people in transit and make an attractive target for causing mass

casualties. It also is an attractive site for early engagement because it creates general transportation chaos, provides a good environment to blend in with other transient people carrying articles and baggage, and makes identification and apprehension difficult.

Religious Targets – These targets are attractive for their political and religious value and are usually designed solely to send a message and create terror. The last targets occupied in the Mumbai attacks were religious in nature and it is possible to assume that terrorists seeking a final glorifying act will move to these symbolic targets as their last place of defense and final mayhem. Being able to quickly identify, notify and communicate with these vulnerable targets early in an unfolding attack of this nature may save lives.

Overall, we have no doubt that continued and careful study and examination by security assessment professionals and strategists will yield important and valuable preparedness and response practices. Even absent those forthcoming insights, the Mumbai attacks clearly demonstrate the significant value that cohesive and adaptable community-wide emergency communications and information sharing capabilities can offer in events of this nature.

¹ The information used for this article was gathered from generally available public news sources, including reports published by the BBC News, Times of India, New York Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal.