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What Can the U.S. Do to Prevent Another Mass Shooting?

By **ROBERT R. FRIEDMANN** October 16, 2017

Terrorism has permeated modern-day life. There have been about 30 attacks a month all over the world since 2010, including knifings, shootings, bombings, car bombs, suicide bombings, and vehicle rammings. This year alone, Barcelona, London, Manchester, Paris, and Stockholm have experienced major attacks.

The massive shooting attack in Las Vegas earlier this month is yet hard to classify. It appears to have been done without an overt ideological, religious, or known personal motivation typically seen in other terrorist attacks. It was meticulously planned, carefully prepared, and the gunman, Stephen Paddock, seems to have trained well for it by being fully armed, calculating positions, distances, velocity, and shooting angles for maximum kill. Regardless of the reasons behind such attacks, what is common to all of them is the carnage they inflict on defenseless, vulnerable human beings anywhere. So why did no one see it coming?

Better security might have prevented the Las Vegas shooting. Some have argued that there is nothing that could have been done because security at the concert site was adequate, and no one expected an attack from a 32nd-floor hotel window across the street. True. But these are the very assumptions that need to change.

Even events with VIP presence (a U.S. president) that are thoroughly checked prior to and during the event aren't fail-safe. Conducting K-9 sweeps, ID'ing spectators, limiting access, and observing possible lines of fire from rooftops and other strategic locations are performed as a matter of routine. But President John F. Kennedy was in the line of fire from an "unsuspected" strategic position, and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was allowed to be too close to the assassin who wasn't vetted or suspected. A higher level of security doesn't guarantee absolute safety.

Lessons were learned. So what can hotels and other private or public venues do to better protect their guests and crowds?

There are short-term and long-term solutions, and they depend on the understanding of the threat. Attacks happen when motive is combined with capability. Therefore, defense strategies and tactics need to focus on minimizing the capability to carry out an attack as well as reducing the motivation that is likely to initiate it. Physical security addresses capability, and community policing addresses motive and intent.

For starters, physical security arrangements need to take into account not only the immediate protected event venue, but also its surroundings. Public places need better perimeter protective shield. It's hard to grasp how Paddock was able to move loads of weapons and ammunition into the hotel without ever raising any suspicion in a site monitored 24/7 by security cameras. Physical security relies on police and private security and on the respective technology at their disposal. Yet, their deterrent capability and effectiveness cannot stop or prevent threats from determined individuals or organizations. Countries with a long history of suffering terror attacks (Israel, U.K.) found out that while they cannot prevent 100% of the attacks, they are successful in thwarting many because of early detection, timely intervention, and rapid response. And that is a result of thorough, community-based intelligence apparatus as well as relying on community assistance for information, early warning signs, understanding community dynamics, and working with community groups to mitigate potential threats.

In addition to physical security comprised of personnel, barriers, spot checks, technology, and intelligence, the public needs to be viewed as the long-term force multiplier where citizens, employees, teachers, guests, visitors, business people, passengers, pedestrians, and anyone out and about should partake in the co-production of public (and private) safety. That means sharing information, remaining alert, and reporting suspicious behavior. The community can offer an added dimension to fight such attacks as efforts move beyond the reliance on physical security alone by focusing on community-control mechanisms that reject the aims of the would-be terrorists, or provide advance warning if there are telltale signs.

Public law enforcement and private security and community groups need to form partnerships to share information, training, resources, and pertinent intelligence so they can do together what each agency cannot do alone. That means better cooperation between private security and public law enforcement; and between law enforcement agencies and community groups such as churches, advocacy groups, academia, voluntary associations, and professional organizations. Citizens need to gain a better understanding of potential threats and what they can do to help, and law enforcement agencies need to seek community support to be more effective, acceptable, and proactive. Businesses rely on the public not only as customers, but also as employees or visitors who should enhance security by being more informed and cooperative. For example, hotels should encourage guests to report suspicious persons or activities, develop situational awareness, cooperate with hotel personnel, and be aware of hotel security information.

Lastly, public and private security entities, schools, businesses, and community groups need to provide training on recognizing suspicious behavior in public places and on information sharing, all in an attempt to create a force multiplier to enhance public and private safety personnel who cannot do the job all alone. Training could be offered to the public by police and community groups and offered to the private sector by internal security personnel and consultants.

Community campaigns on wearing seat belts, reducing smoking, improving health, and recycling waste have been effective. It's time to harness the public to provide information, to be aware of its surroundings, and to assist public and private safety personnel to minimize the likelihood of such attacks or of their lethality. This is where community policing can be helpful by being proactive, creating partnerships, and relying on community resources to minimize crime and terrorism, and it will provide for better community resilience.

Robert R. Friedmann is founding director at Georgia International Law Enforcement Exchange (GILEE) and Professor Emeritus of Criminal Justice at Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University.