



Preparing for the global threat of terrorism

Terrorism has far-reaching effects including psychological, social and behavioural impacts. The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) is contributing to the changing nature of terrorism, with ISIS calling upon their followers to conduct small-scale attacks in Western countries. (Levine and Margolin, 2015).

While communities can prepare themselves to respond to the impact of natural hazards such as flooding and earthquakes, this raises the question; can they prepare themselves for the global security threat of terrorism? This complex issue is being examined by the European Commission funded TACTIC (Tools, methods And training for Communities and society to better prepare for a Crisis) project.

The TACTIC Project

TACTIC is a two-year project that aims to increase preparedness to large-scale and cross-border disasters amongst communities and societies in Europe. The project is developing a number of tools to increase the preparedness of organisations managing risks, and the general public, including:

- A participatory self-assessment that enables organisations and the general public to assess how prepared they are for multi-hazards, including terrorism
- A catalogue of good practices of communication and education for preparedness
- A web-based platform acting as an interactive curriculum for learning about preparedness for large-scale and cross-border disasters.

Four case studies focusing on different security issues, or what the project refers to as hazards, (terrorism, floods, epidemics and

earthquakes) are used to develop and test these tools. However, by focusing on multiple hazards, TACTIC has found that preparedness for each of these hazards varies considerably, with preparedness for terrorism being more complex.

Can we prepare for terrorism?

TACTIC's case study on terrorism sought to understand how terrorism is different to other threats to European security, and what these differences mean for preparedness and how organisations can prepare their communities to respond to a terrorist attack. Through a review of the literature and a workshop with different actors preparing for terrorism (e.g. representatives from public authorities, civil society, businesses and the community), TACTIC examined what preparedness for terrorism means.

The public can prepare for emergencies by storing useful resources (e.g. food, water, medicine), creating a family plan of what to do in an emergency (e.g. meeting points, contact information) and by identifying local government plans. Preparedness actions such as these can help the public to respond more effectively and reduce the stress of being caught up in an incident. However, in comparison to many natural hazards that to some extent can be predicted, the literature review on terrorism identified how the high uncertainty associated with terrorism makes it more difficult to prepare for.

Terrorists aim to cause maximum devastation in a short amount of time, which means it is difficult to anticipate what the consequences and impacts of an attack will be. The notion that terrorism is designed to generate fear in

the public and that historically there has been a lower likelihood of terrorist attacks occurring means that the public may be unlikely to prepare for terrorism. This is supported by research highlighting low levels of preparedness for terrorism and public criticism of government led campaigns providing advice on what to do in a terrorist attack. For instance, the November 2014 campaign informing the UK public to "run, hide and tell" in response to a terrorist attack was criticised for creating fear (Topping, 2014).

For TACTIC, whilst preparedness for flooding and earthquakes is more straightforward, for terrorism the focus is on preventing, rather than preparing for terrorism. This is reflected in the different types of initiatives that organisations use to communicate security threats to their communities. TACTIC's catalogue of good practices includes many examples of communications material providing information for communities on how to prepare for natural hazards; however, the good practices for terrorism typically focus on prevention.

Whilst organisations are preparing themselves to respond to a terrorist attack through counter-terrorism strategies such as CONTEST, the public's assistance is being requested in terms of preventing future attacks through vigilance and by reporting any suspicious activity.

What these differences mean for TACTIC

The differences identified between preparing for natural hazards such as floods and earthquakes and the man-made threat of terrorism meant that the tools being developed by TACTIC had to reflect the complexity of preparing for terrorism.

Once a first version of the tools had been developed, they were tested during a workshop in London with relevant organisations, including: the police, the media, businesses, non-governmental agencies and community groups. A terrorism scenario was presented to the workshop participants to fully examine the various considerations in preparing for terrorism and to identify how the tools could be used to improve community preparedness for terrorism. The feedback received from participants during the workshop is currently being used to further refine the tools.

A second workshop will be held later this year to gain any feedback on the near final versions of the tools. If you are interested in participating in the workshop, please e-mail Su Anson: susan.anson@trilateralresearch.com.

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