

Seven Signs of Terrorist Activity

Surveillance

If there is a specific target that terrorists have chosen, that target area will be most likely be observed during the planning phase of the operation. They do this in order to determine the strengths, weaknesses, and number of personnel that may respond to an incident. Routes to and from the target are usually established during the surveillance phase. Therefore, it is important to take note of such things as someone recording or monitoring activities, drawing diagrams or annotating on maps, the use of vision-enhancing devices, having in one's possession floor plans or blue prints of places such as high-tech firms, financial institutions, or Government / military facilities. Any of these surveillance-type acts MAY be an indicator that something just is not right. Nothing is too menial and should not be discarded as such.

Elicitation

The second sign or signal is elicitation. What this means is anyone attempting to gain information about a place, person, or operation. An example is someone attempting to gain knowledge about a critical infrastructure like a power plant, water reservoir, or a maritime port. Terrorists may attempt to research bridge and tunnel usage, make unusual inquiries concerning shipments, or inquire as to how a military base operates. They may also attempt to place "key" people in sensitive work locations.

Tests of Security

Tests of Security are another area in which terrorists would attempt to gather data. This is usually conducted by driving by the target, moving into sensitive areas and observing security or law enforcement response. They would be interested in the time in which it takes to respond to an incident or the routes taken to a specific location. They may also try to penetrate physical security barriers or procedures in order to assess strengths and Weaknesses. They often gain legitimate employment at key locations in order to monitor day-to-day activities. In any event, they may try to gain this knowledge in order to make their mission or scheme more effective.

Acquiring Supplies

Another area to be cognizant of is anyone acquiring supplies. It may be a case where someone is purchasing or stealing explosives, weapons, or ammunition. It could also be someone storing harmful chemicals or chemical



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equipment. Terrorists would also find it useful to have in their possession law enforcement equipment and identification, military uniforms and decals, as well as flight passes, badges or even flight manuals. If they can't find the opportunity to steal these types of things, they may try to photocopy ID's, attempt to make passports or other forms of identification by counterfeiting. Possessing any of these would make it easier for one to gain entrance into secured or usually prohibited areas.

Suspicious People Who Don't Belong

A fifth pre-incident indicator is observing suspicious people who just "don't belong." This does not mean we should profile individuals but what it does mean is that we should profile behaviors. This includes suspicious border crossings and stowaways aboard a ship or people jumping ship in a port. It may mean having someone in a workplace, building, neighborhood, or business establishment that does not fit in because of their demeanor, their language usage or unusual questions they are asking. You, as an officer, may respond to a complaint that may appear to be a routine investigation but results in something much bigger in scope.

Dry Runs

Another sign to watch for is "dry runs." Before execution of the final operation or plan, a practice session will be run to work out the flaws and unanticipated problems. A dry run may very well be the heart of a planning stage of a terrorist act. If you find someone monitoring a police radio frequency and recording emergency response times, you may very well be observing a "dry run." Another element of this activity could include mapping out routes and determining the timing of traffic lights and flow. It is during this stage that it is actually our best chance to intercept and stop an attack. Multiple dry runs are normally conducted at or near the target area.

Deploying Assets / Getting Into Position

The seventh and final sign or signal to look for is someone deploying assets or getting into position. This is a person's last chance to alert authorities before the terrorist act occurs.

It is also important to remember that pre-incident indicators may come months or even years apart. Therefore, it is extremely important to document every fragment of information, no matter how insignificant it may appear, and forward this information.

