

# The Role of Volunteer Citizens in Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness

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Terrorists have targeted US interests and its citizens abroad for many years, but not until the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 had anyone witness a terrorist attack of such magnitude on U.S. soil and even that incident failed to register its true significance. People were used to seeing terrorist's acts on television on a daily basis; nevertheless, they perceived them as events typical of third-world countries, or places like Israel, Ireland, and Colombia. However, this entire mindset changed drastically the morning of September 11, 2001 (Rivera, 2004, p.1).

The aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). DHS is responsible for merging capabilities to anticipate, preempt, and deter threats to the homeland whenever possible and the ability to respond quickly when such threats do materialize. It is also responsible for assessing the vulnerabilities of the Nation's critical infrastructure and cyber security threats. DHS takes the lead in evaluating these vulnerabilities and coordinating with other federal, state, and local agencies to ensure the most effective response.

Although these measures have proven effective against acts of the magnitude of the 9-11 attacks, they will not deter the terrorist. Terrorist organizations have become more networks founded—Cells with self-financed organizational structure, with decentralized execution authority. Part of the terrorist's strategy for the future will most likely include an increase in

traditional terrorists operations such as kidnappings, assassinations, bombings, and sabotage against softer targets similar to those carried in Israel. Terrorist organizations will also continue to employ weaponry suitable for such operations as well as continue their pursuit of obtaining and using weapons of mass destruction (Rivera, 2004).

The fact of the matter is that Homeland Security also involves civil defense, that is, citizens engaged in homeland security (White, 2006). In July 2003 the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology, presented a report titled *The Science and Technology of Combating Terrorism*, which states;

*Leadership in response to terrorism must originate with government. However, in this war—as in others where civilians have become targets (e.g., the London bombing blitz during World War II)—there is much that individual civilians can do to protect themselves, working hand-in-hand with federal, state and local governments. However, except for the recent and highly localized activities stemming from the declaration of a high (orange) threat level alert, there has been little involvement in self-defense on the part of the general public to date. This is not likely to change unless something happens to increase general awareness of the nature of the danger we face from potential terrorist use of weapons of mass destruction, and unless people are informed and motivated to take steps to improve the chances of survival for themselves and their families(p.6).*

The bottom line is; US emergency personnel and government agencies are among the best in the world; however, there is still a need for individuals in the private sector to embrace the personal responsibility for their safety and the safety of their loved ones. Everyone can do something to support local law enforcement, fire, emergency medical services, community public health efforts, and the four stages of emergency management: prevention, mitigation, response and recovery efforts. As President John F. Kennedy said; *And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country* (JFK Presidential Library, 1961).

An example of said initiatives is the Coalition of Nurses for Communities in Disaster (CONCID) founded by a nurse and University professor. This organization provides assistance to governmental and private, as well as local, regional and national disaster organizations in the identification, recruitment and training of nurses to place emphasis on activities of prevention, preparedness and identification of health priorities during the mitigation, response and recovery phases of a disaster with the intent of minimizing health morbidity and mortality in vulnerable and at risk communities. This is being accomplished by providing a database of volunteer nurses interested in serving as leaders and collaborators in health disaster management strategic planning in their community of residence. Coordinating efforts and partnerships with recognized agencies dedicated to intervene in all phases of disaster and providing continuing education, training and skills update in disaster related topics and tasks organization has also reached out to private individuals with experience in other areas—such Anti-terrorism, Counter Terrorism and Security—to use their subject matter expertise to enhance community preparedness (CONCID Website, 2008).

In addition to the aforementioned, CONCID has organized and conducted a number of events and drills for the purpose of training members of the community and improving interoperability between government agencies, private entities and citizens at all levels, as well as validating existing disaster response plans. Sine qua non; a plan can look really good in paper, but if it is not known by all players, exercised and validated, it does not amount to more than just good intentions and wishful thinking.



**Professor Matos—Director of CONCID—with participants of the communities in disaster drill of the 1<sup>st</sup> CONCID Congress**



**Volunteer nurses working hand in hand with other first responders in simulated terrorist chemical attack during CONCID Second Congress**

Examples of activities during the past year related to preparedness included themes on the phenomena of terrorism. The events focused on violence in disaster and self-defense training for the responder, a two hours lecture on the phenomena of terrorism presented by an expert in matters of security and terrorism. Lectures given included various definitions of terrorism, terrorists operations, how terrorist's acts—such as the 9-11 attacks—can transmogrify individual's and communities behavior, types of terrorist organizations, their goals, development phases of terrorist organizations and networks, security measures, infrastructure and functions of terrorist's cells, hierarchy and terrorist networks, as well as terrorists and the threat of Weapons of Mass-Destruction (WMD).

These lectures were followed by a drill of a simulated terrorist chemical attack which emphasized the role of the health professional when confronted with a terrorist acts, and intervention of health teams in response to terrorist's incidents. The objective of this event was to train nurses and other volunteers, as well as promoted interoperability between the private sector and government agencies such as; the Regional Department of Health, Area Bio-security, the State Disaster Administration and Management Agency (AEMEAD), state and local Police Departments Explosives and Ordinance Disposal (EOD) Division, The Regional Fire Department, Regional Emergency Medical Services, area hospitals and Campus Security personnel.

Additional examples of citizens prevention and preparedness activities was the FEMA NIMS 100 course—Incident Command System presented to selected members of the faculty of

the University, to the Special Operations Response Team (SORT) of the police department and to members of other local and state agencies. In addition CONCID's Security and Terrorism Consultant provides in a regular bases, specialized training to law-enforcement professionals, members of the Police SORT Unit. These training exercises consist in the application of less than lethal force in support of emergency responders—an area often overlooked, however, of great significance. The fact of the matter is that under stressful situations—such as disasters of terrorist type—human behavior can be very unpredictable. These skills enable law officers to control persons that display aggressive and or unruly behavior without the use of weapons or deadly force. The use of said tactics will not only protect the responders, but also the aggressors from becoming a victim of their own irrational behavior.



**The Special Operations Response Team of the Puerto Rico Police receiving instruction in the application of less than lethal force in support of emergency responders**



**Professor Matos presenting Incident Command System (ICS) training to selected members of the PR Police, as well as faculty and security police of the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez Campus (RUM)**

In addition to the aforementioned activities, the director and the terrorism and security consultant to CONCID also evaluated the University's Emergency Plan and identified a number of deficiencies that included; however, were not limited to the inapplicability of the Bomb Threat Management plan (UPRM, 2006, p. 35-41) and the lack of tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP's) dealing with Active Shooter's Incident's (ASI). ASI's has become a priority for institutions of higher learning education after the events as reported by CNN, on April 16, 2007, during which Seung Hui Cho—a disturbed student of Virginia Tech—killed 32 students and faculty members and wounded another 17, which is an example of the lack of preparedness of many communities regarding situation dealing with terrorist acts (Rivera, 2007, p.1).

Numerous agencies and individual members of the community joined efforts—under auspices of the director of CONCID—and volunteered their subject matter expertise to develop and execute a training event that facilitated the development of new TTP's at the individual and collective levels for all participants as well as the Active Shooter's Incidents Appendix to the RUM Emergency Plan.

The latest in the series of activities is the 4th CONCID Congress that took place from 11 to 12 July 2008. This event focused on Health and Security issues and concerns in Mega Sport Events. The primary reason for selecting the theme was the upcoming Central American and Caribbean Games (CCA Games). This event was conducted in two parts; A day of conferences, at the *Mayagüez Resort and Casino* and a simulated drill, on the grounds of the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez Campus (RUM).

The first lecture was presented by CONCID's Security Consultant Luis Rivera. The plenary focused on the need for preparation and training in the areas of Security for Special Events. Rivera highlighted the fact that after the terrorist's attacks of September 11, 2001, people were hesitant to attend Special Events—such as Mega Sport Events—in fear of a recurrence of similar attacks as well as the devastating impact lack of security can have in the economy should an incident occur and evidence shows that not enough was done to provide a secure environment for the public. A brief history on security flaws that led to terrorist's acts in Mega Sport Events, such as the kidnapping and assassination of the Israeli athletes 1972 Munich Olympics, and the bombing at the Sentential Park in Atlanta as well as the planning and implementation of tactics, techniques and procedures associated with preventing such incidents were also covered.



#### **Action Photos of the 4<sup>th</sup> CONCID Congress**

A presentation by Dr. Abigail Matos—CONCID Director and an associated Professor of the RUM followed. Dr. Matos explained the importance of putting emphasis in the areas of planning for extreme conditions and identifying the standards to be maintained to avoid putting medical personnel and victims in harms way. This in turn would ensure the availability of immediate medical care even under extreme conditions.

A lecture in the use and application of technology in the area of security was presented by the Director of the Computation Center of the RUM, Mr. Victor Diaz. Diaz made reference to the importance of leveraging the latest advances in technology in events such as the CCA

Games. He presented detailed analysis of the technologies that has been successfully used in past Olympics.

Other presentations included Organization of a Sexual Assault Response Team by Professor Rose Mendez, Preparedness and Planning for Extreme events by Wisbell Ayala from the Emergency Management Agency, and many others representatives from the Puerto Rico Olympic Committee, the Salvation Army and FEMA.

The information presented during the conferences was put into practice during the simulated drills. The drills included the participation of many of the aforementioned agencies as well as the local hospitals and the Special Response Unit of the Puerto Rico Police Department. The drills focused in the response to victims of a terrorist's bombing as well as bullet wounds caused by a simulated terrorist attack in the Olympic Village and the rescue of a number of athletes from a hijacked bus.

The outcomes of these events include; multidisciplinary membership growth, the integration of nursing leadership in activities of disaster preparedness and response for communities, private and governmental agencies, the collaboration and integration of multidisciplinary personnel, the collaboration of multi-agencies (civil, private and governmental) during annual congress and drills, the integration of former military personnel as consultant with extensive experience in areas of terrorism and security as well as command and staff functions, the sponsorship of training events by Subject Matter Experts in areas of great importance for the community (Bomb threat, Terrorism, Active Shooter's Incidents, Violence in Disaster, Health and Security for Special Events as well as the ICS as a collaborative tool), The promotion of interoperability between campus security, local and state law-enforcement entities, nurses and emergency medical personnel, as well as the inclusion of hospital preparedness and response exercise activities ( Mass casualties, chemical explosion, multiple trauma, terrorism and Hospital Emergency Incident Command System).

This Nation's leadership has done a superb job regarding the current national strategy/plan for combating terrorism at the strategic and operational levels—things like protecting critical infrastructure. Terrorist's acts or events has been classified and managed as man made disasters. Some types of disasters can't be prevented, therefore; efforts are focused in the areas of preparedness, mitigation and response. However, terrorist's events can be prevented, for this reason; the re-focusing of training and preparedness of the communities from disaster response to disaster prevention and mitigation must be favorably considered. As demonstrated by the aforementioned outcomes, the individual citizen is a valuable resource in protecting the communities against acts of terrorism. Therefore, involvement of private citizens—the soldier at the tactical level—must be encouraged.

*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, is the only thing that ever has.”*

*Margaret Mead.*

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