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SUICIDE BOMBERS: WHAT NEW IACP "TRAINING KEYS" SAY YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT A DEADLY THREAT THAT'S JUST WAITING TO HAPPEN HERE

Part 1 of a 2-Part Series

If you encounter a subject you reasonably believe is a would-be suicide bomber, a recently issued and unusually aggressive set of guidelines published by the International Assn. of Chiefs of Police recommends that you:

- shoot to kill the suspect,
- deliver your round(s) to his or her head as the surest means of inducing instant de-animation,
- rely on your "reasonable basis to believe that the suspect has the capability to detonate a bomb" as justification for using deadly force, rather than waiting for any overt indication of imminent threat, and
- "fire from cover to avoid the effects of a potential explosion."

If the suspect exhibits what you believe is a sincere desire to surrender before you start shooting, "direct him or her to remove the explosive device carried and all clothing" at an unspecified "standoff" range, the guidelines advise.

These suggestions, along with a "carefully developed behavioral profile" of potential suicide (homicide) bombers, appear in 2 Training Keys sent by the IACP to its more than 19,000 members in 100 countries last month [7/05]. The Keys were prepared by Dr. Robert Bunker, a consultant to the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center-West in El Segundo, CA.

While commending the IACP reports for wisely anticipating terrorist forces eventually deploying suicide bombers in this country and for attempting to deal with this complex, controversial subject in a forthright manner, use-of-force experts consulted by Force Science News expressed concerns about some of the implications of the recommendations for the law enforcement community. These concerns encompass personnel, equipment, training, operational, legal and societal issues.

In this first installment of our 2-part series, we'll report on the published recommendations themselves and the thinking behind them. In the second installment, to follow shortly, we'll explore the observations of the experts we consulted.

Your reactions to both installments are of interest to the Force Science Research Center at Minnesota State University-Mankato. Please send us your comments at

info@forcesciencenews.com and we will publish a representative sampling in a future transmission of FSN.

Across 10 printed pages, the IACP's Training Keys recap a brief history of suicide bombing internationally, draw a disturbing but seemingly realistic portrait of the threat that likely awaits American LEOs, offer a handful of common pre-event indicators that may help in identifying such suspects and provide specific tactical instruction for stopping their deadly intentions and surviving the encounter.

The full IACP reports can be accessed online.

For IACP Training Key #581 - Suicide Bombers, Part One visit:
<http://www.theiacp.org/pubinfo/IACP581SuicideBombersPart1.pdf>

For IACP Training Key #582 - Suicide Bombers, Part Two, visit:
<http://www.theiacp.org/pubinfo/IACP582SuicideBombersPart2.pdf>

While the U.S. so far "has been spared the horror of frequent suicide bombings," the IACP information points out that "[e]mbedded cells of militants with international ties to terrorism, as well as domestic terrorists, pose the potential" for such attacks.

"Law enforcement personnel need to recognize that, if encountered, a suicide bomber will behave differently from a normal street criminal and will actively engage police forces" as a "criminal-soldier," the guidelines warn.

Although the Keys acknowledge 2 basic types of suicide bombers (individual and vehicular), their primary focus is on the former. These suspects typically carry from 1 to 35 pounds of explosives in vests, belts, satchels, backpacks, shoes, bras, boxes, gym bags, briefcases, guitar cases, computers, video cameras, birdcages, "even a watermelon." To date "[n]o recorded use of cavity bombs (i.e., in the stomach, rectum or vagina) exists, but this tactic represents a potential threat."

Preferred targets include "[l]arge masses of people in public areas" and on public transportation; military forces; "[p]olice on the street, in their stations and at their favorite restaurants;" VIPs, including government officials and other political leaders; infrastructure, including nuclear power plants, control rooms of electrical grids, financial centers and vehicles like trains, planes and ships; and "symbolic venues."

A suicide bomber "functions as a precision weapon, taking the explosive device right to the target," the IACP's information says. "Suicide bombers infected with hepatitis and HIV can create a hazmat incident by spreading disease to targeted personnel" via bone fragments, blood spray and blood-covered shrapnel. Bombers have also "coated bolts and nails with rat poison (an anticoagulant) to cause additional bleeding in the victims."

No simple, reliable suicide bomber profile exists, the Training Keys say. "Men, women and adolescents have all engaged in this activity." Most commonly, though, bombers are "unmarried males between 16 and 40 years old," and to a lesser extent, females between 16 and 25.

Because of "stealth-masking" (the disguise and concealment of both the suspect's explosives and intentions), a skilled suicide bomber may not be recognized "until the device is detonated." But the Training Keys do offer some behavioral cues to watch for, cautioning that while "any one indicator by itself may not be cause for concern, multiple anomalies will signify a potential threat." These cues include:

Behavior.

"Does the individual act oddly, appear fearful, or use mannerisms that do not fit in? Examples include repeatedly circling an area on foot or in a car, pacing back and forth in front of a venue, glancing left and right while walking slowly, fidgeting with something under his or her clothes, exhibiting an unwillingness to make eye contact, mumbling (prayer) or repeatedly checking a watch or cell phone.

"An unusual gait, especially a robotic walk, could indicate someone forcing or willing himself or herself to go through with a mission....The bomber often will be fixated on the target and for that reason will look straight ahead." The suspect may also show signs of sweating "and other.

nervous behavior."

Be alert for signs of drug use, including "enlarged pupils, fixed stare, and erratic behavior." Some bombers have been drugged before an attack.

"It seems obvious that anyone who tries to avoid...surveillance cameras and guards, or who appears to be surreptitiously conducting surveillance of a possible target location, may be a bomber."

Appearance.

"Is the clothing, grooming, gender or age of an individual out of place within the context of the environment? Examples include someone wearing a heavy coat or jacket in warm weather, overly bulky or loose-fitting clothing, protrusions under the clothing, or...badly dyed hair. Chemical burns on clothing or stained hands are other indicators."

A male "with a fresh shave and lighter skin on his lower face may be a religious Muslim zealot who has just shaved his beard so as not to attract attention, and to blend in better....Is the individual wearing too much cologne or perfume, or does he or she smell of talcum powder or scented water (for ritual purification)?"

Equipment.

"Does a briefcase, duffle bag or backpack seem extra heavy or have protrusions or visible wires? When the individual sits down, is he or she overly protective of this item or preoccupied with it?"

Also a hand in the pocket or tightly gripping something could indicate "someone clutching a detonator or a trigger for an explosive device. Such triggers, which may be designed in the form of a button, usually are rather stiff so that they may not be set off accidentally."

Where it's possible, the suicide-bomber guidelines stress the importance of pre-incident intelligence-gathering to help identify likely suspects and prevent a disaster. But in the real world, you may be forced into making a split-second shoot/don't shoot decision without guaranteed proof to go on.

"[I]n extreme situations where the bomber is already mixed in with masses of people or is already closing in on them," the guidelines recommend as one "containment" option "[s]acrificing police dogs to take down [the suspect] and keep him or her from reaching a target or breaking through a security perimeter."

Another possibility "in open areas" would be "firing a warning shot in the air to get members of the public in covered or prone positions before engaging the bomber with lethal force." This may "reduce the fragmentation effects of the bomber," according to the recommendations.

"Except in extreme situations, do not get close to a suspected bomber--if the bomber cannot reach the intended target, he or she may detonate to avoid arrest, and, in the process, kill as many law enforcement officers as possible. Even if the bomber wants to surrender, or is wounded or dead, maintain standoff distance" and cover, if you have any available. "Bombers appearing to surrender may use this as a ruse to draw in unsuspecting law enforcement personnel.

"Even if a bomber sincerely wishes to surrender, he or she may be carrying a bomb that can be triggered by a third party (by cell phone or radio wave). Dead and wounded suspects and their possessions may also carry secondary command-detonated devices or deadman switches and other forms of booby traps.

"If a bomber wants to surrender, direct him or her to remove the explosive device or items carried and all clothing at standoff ranges," understanding that "[t]his protocol will not play well in the media."

A more likely option for ending the encounter is deadly force. "Lethal force is justified if the suspect represents a significant threat of death or serious injury to an officer or others," the IACP's information notes. However, the viewpoint expressed regarding justification departs from the parameters of customary lethal force decision-making and from many departmental policies.

One of the Training Keys notes: "Federal laws and rulings are better attuned to the type of national security threat that suicide bombers represent from both a criminal and civil liability perspective. Officers should be reminded that [federal] law does not require that the threat of death or serious injury be imminent [that word is italicized in the Key], as is sometimes noted in police use-of-force policies. This point is very important...when one is dealing with explosive devices capable of widespread death and destruction.

"One need not wait until a suicide bomber makes a move or takes other action potentially sufficient to carry out the bombing when officers have reasonable basis to believe that the suspect has the capability to detonate a bomb. The threat [italicized] of such use is, in most instances, sufficient justification to employ deadly force. An officer need only determine that the use of deadly force is objectively reasonable under the circumstances."

Once you're satisfied lethal force is legally justified, "aim for the head," the recommendations instruct.

As a line officer, you're probably trained to fire at center mass. But using this tactic against suicide bombers "is inappropriate," the guidelines say. For one thing, a center-mass shot "may only wound the bomber, and a wounded bomber may still detonate the device." Or "if a round hits the explosive device, it may detonate," especially if the weapon incorporates components that are "sensitive to heat, shock and friction." Moreover, the suspect could be wearing soft body armor.

Considered ideal for "immediately terminating the threat" is a "fragmenting, high-velocity shot from a firearm such as an AR-15," fired "at the tip of the nose when facing the bomber, at the point of the ear canal from the side or about one inch below the base of the skull from behind."

Accurately placed, such a shot will kill the bomber "before he or she can take action to detonate the explosive device and will not accidentally set off the device" itself. If the suspect is already down but struggling with officers trying unsuccessfully to control him or her at the time you decide to fire, "take the head shot by placing the pistol directly to the bomber's head" in one of the particularly vulnerable spots mentioned above.

"Under no circumstances," the Training Keys emphasize, "are tasers or other electrical discharge devices to be utilized against a bomber, as the charge they deliver may detonate the explosive device." The Keys also warns officers to shoot from behind cover if possible to avoid or minimize the effects of any explosion that results.

What if an officer is wrong in his judgment and shoots a subject who turns out not to have explosives? This has already happened in London where officers killed a supposedly "innocent" immigrant with head shots shortly after the subway bombings there last month, about 2 weeks after the IACP released the recommendations.

The IACP's training does not address that issue in detail, but does advise that the chilling potential for a terrorist "sting" operation should be considered. This would be "a contrived incident in which law enforcement is forced to kill an individual they have probable cause to believe is a suicide bomber moving against a target, but who turns out not to be....This type of operation would serve as terrorist propaganda to disrupt national response efforts."

If suicide bombers target the U.S. and its allies, flawed judgment calls are but one of many complexities that are certain to plague street officers and their agencies. And as the IACP's information sees it, suicide bombing is more likely a "when" situation than an "if."

In the wake of 9/11, the guidelines note, "most counterterrorism experts believe that more attacks are a certainty. Experts also believe that they will happen sooner rather than later, and that they will take place with increasing frequency. Experience suggests that the next attack will not be as spectacular" as that of the World Trade Center. Whatever form and timing such attacks take, "law enforcement is faced with the challenges of preventing such actions."

Dr. Bunker, author of the IACP's suicide bomber Training Keys, is a counter-terrorism consultant to the Counter-OPFOR (opposition forces) Program at the NLECTC-West. He's a former professor of Unconventional Warfare at the American Military University and a past Fellow at the Army's Institute of Land Warfare. His research specialties are non-state threats,

emerging forms of warfare, advanced weaponry and operations/counter-operations strategies.

The 11-year-old NLECTC-West, an entity of the National Institute of Justice, provides technical assistance, education and training, access to state-of-the-art equipment and procedures and current technical information to assist law enforcement and corrections agencies free of charge.

Philip Lynn, manager of IACP's National Law Enforcement Policy Center, which produces the association's Training Keys, told Force Science News that reporting on suicide-bomber counter-tactics was Bunker's idea. What he wrote was vetted through the NLECTC-West and not through the IACP, Lynn says. The chiefs' group published the guidelines/recommendations purely as an enlightening "expert's document," Lynn explains, rather than as any statement of IACP policy or endorsement, although the association's logo is prominent on the documents and they carry no disclaimer or qualifier.

Lynn told us that stirring up discussion on anti-bomber tactics was not an initial goal of the Keys' publication, but he welcomes it as an unexpected consequence.

NEXT: What challenges, dilemmas and troublesome ramifications are inherent in the recommendations published by the IACP? Will agencies adopt these guidelines? Will officers comply with them if given the green light to do so? What factors will spell the difference between success and failure in this new version of what it may mean to be a street cop? Read what use-of-force experts have to say in the next FSN transmission, containing Part 2 of our special report.

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