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- Organizations
- Tournaments
- Site Search
- Shopping
- The Martial Mall
- Media
- Videos
- Books
- Movies
- Magazines
- Learn
- World Wide Dojo
- University
- Learning Center
- Articles
- Biographies
- Reviews
- Styles
- Getting Started
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BOMB ATTACKS
BY JIM WAGNER



The Original
Martial Arts Photographer



BOMB ATTACKS
By Jim Wagner

You may be learning a martial arts system in order to protect yourself against a common criminal, but does your training also include how to handle the global wave of terrorism? Is your system designed to give you the tools you need to survive armed attacks, kidnappings, and most recently – bombings? The Reality-Based system does.

Doing Something about It

Bombings are the most favored method of attack by terrorists. In recent years, and months, bombings have only increased, not decreased. The following paragraph is a translation of an actual Al-Qaida document found in a safe house in Afghanistan. It reads:

Explosives are believed to be the safest weapon for the Mujahadeen (refers to all holy warriors) that allows them to get away from enemy personnel and to avoid being arrested. An assassination using explosives doesn't leave any evidence or traces at the operation site. In addition, explosives strike the enemy with sheer terror and fright.

You can throw up your hands in despair and say that you can do nothing about it, or you can do your part and train yourself, just like you do for other threats. If you are an instructor of the martial arts, you have an even greater responsibility to learn modern tactics and pass that knowledge onto your students.

For years I have been writing to you through Budo magazine about modern threats, as well as common threats. By now everyone should be familiar with my term "Reality-Based" as it relates to self-defense. The definition is this:

Training and survival skills based on modern conflict situations that the practitioner is likely to encounter in their environment (their "reality").

For any of us who live, work, or travel through big cities bombings or the threat of a bombing is part of our "reality." As a recent former counterterrorist agent for the United States government, and a police officer of 17 years having dealt with actual bomb situations, my goal is to provide you with the necessary information that you need to detect a device (Pre-Conflict), what to do at the moment of attack (Conflict), and recovering from the attack (Post-Conflict) just as I teach in my monthly seminar TERRORISM SURVIVAL.

Receiving a Bomb Threat

The most common crime dealing with bombs is a bomb threat called in by phone. Although most bomb threats turn out to be false, there many criminals and terrorist who give warning prior to detonating their dangerous package. These callers are only interested in destroying property, and not killing people. Because this form of terrorism is the most common it is important that you know how to handle such a situation.

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When you receive a bomb threat you need not immediately panic. If the caller wanted to blow you up, he would have. The goal is to stay on the line as long as possible with the caller in order to gain "intelligence" (INTEL) for the police. Near the phone, especially for high risk businesses, you should have a Bomb Threat Card that has the following questions on it, and where you can write down the answers as the caller is speaking:

1. Name of the person who spoke to the caller
2. Telephone number that the call was received on (in cases of multiple lines)
3. Date and time of the call
4. Exact words of the caller
5. Background noises (street sounds, machinery, etc.)
6. Information about the caller
 - a) Male or female
 - b) Estimated age
 - c) Accent or speech impediments
 - d) Attitude (angry, calm, disguised, etc.)
 - e) Educational level (professional, street slang, etc.)
 - f) Is the voice familiar?

Searching a Building for a Bomb

If you do receive a bomb threat via the telephone it is important to know how to search for an Improvised Explosive Device (IED). Many people think that the police will automatically come, evacuate the building, and put all of their resources into searching the building. However, that is not always the case. If the police reacted like this to every bomb threat they received they would be doing that job exclusively and every criminal, terrorist, and practical joker would be taking advantage of the police. In most instances the police will rely on you to let them know if it is a credible threat or not, and they will most likely have you, or your associates, look for anything suspicious. After all, you are familiar with your surrounds and would know if something is out of place or not, the police would not. They will warn you not to touch anything if you come across it or not, but you will be the one to find the object and alert them to it.

If you are the type to panic, and evacuate everyone outside because you think the place is going to blow, then you may be herding people into the "kill zone." Many terrorist "test" an organization's security system and evacuation plan by calling in a false report, then doing surveillance on the location to see where everybody goes. Then, they may come back at a later time and plant their deadly device. The next time they call in the bomb threat or pull the fire alarm, and everyone goes rushing outside to a predetermined location, they have a car bomb or other device waiting for everyone. This tactic is heartless, but is the growing trend.

If you are tasked to search a building you should have a systematic system. The one I teach goes like this:

1. First, go into the middle of the room, then STOP, LOOK, and LISTEN. If you have a partner they can take the other half of the room. If you have not observed anything unusual then begin a search from the bottom up. Start with items on the floor and work your way up toward the ceiling one imaginary level at a time. Think of searching upward three like a layered cake until you come to the ceiling. This method is called the Sweep Pattern. The first layer that you search will be from the floor to your waste. The second layer will be from your waste to your head. The third layer will be from your head to the ceiling.
2. Give particular attention to closet areas, stairwells, trash receptacles, removable panels, light fixtures, etc.
3. Don't just look for the obvious (like bombs you see in the movies. i.e., sticks of dynamite, wires, and a clicking clock), but any item which looks suspicious. Bombs come in all shapes and sizes. For those in government positions, you have to be even more thorough in your searches since you will be looking for C-4 (plastic explosive), FOAM-X, Semtex or any other type of RDX or PETN variation which can be molded into any shape imaginable. Palestinian terrorists have taken fire extinguishers and filled them with explosives and replaced the target area fire extinguisher with their own. Of course, explosive detectors or bomb-sniffing dogs should be utilized if you have those type of resources.

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4. Classified documents and computers should also be inspected since they are often targeted.
5. Conduct a systematic exterior search as well. Look in containers, around heating and cooling systems, on the roof, etc. Suspicious vehicles parked nearby should also be reported. Car bombs should not be ruled out.
6. Do not use radios or mobile phones within a two-block area since some bombs can be activated via remote control and radio waves may set it off by accident.

Package and Letter Bombs

Another common type of bombing is that of package and letter bombs. Usually these types of devices are meant for a specific individual to whom the package or letter was addressed to. Such attacks are not just reserved for terrorists, but ex-lovers, disgruntled employees, or mentally disturbed persons have used the mail system or a delivery system to exact out revenge. Thus, you should always be careful when you get a letter or package you are unsure about. Explosives can be so thin that it can be made to feel like a birthday card with some cash in it, so don't think that a bomb has to be this bulky or cumbersome.

Here are some indicators of what to look for:

1. Instruct family members, co-workers or staff to refuse unexpected mail.
2. When travelling abroad, never accept any unexpected mail.
3. Indicators of a package or letter bomb are:
 - a) Excessive postage
 - b) Fake or no return address
 - c) Restrictive markings (i.e., "PERSONAL," "CONFIDENTIAL," "PRIVATE," etc.)
 - d) Excessive weight, uneven weight, lopsided or rigid letter
 - e) Unusual amount of masking tape or string to hold the package or letter together
 - f) Oily stains or discoloration on the box or envelope which is caused by leaking chemicals or explosives "sweat."
 - Buzzing, ticking or sloshing noises or strange odor from inside

Hand Grenade Attack

Although hand grenades fall into the category of a small arms attack, it is a bombing none the less. A hand grenade is a handheld explosive that is activated by a burning fuse or a timed fuse, such as a military hand grenade. Hand grenade attacks are common, because they are light, concealable, and easy to use. Military style grenades can also be placed as a booby trap. Once a trip wire pulls the pin or the grenade is knocked out of place and the safety spoon twirls off, the victim only has five seconds or less to react.

To survive a hand grenade attack you must do the following:

1. Observe where the grenade lands. Not only should you note where the grenade lands, but where it might roll. Most grenades are round, and can roll quite a ways from where they first hit the ground. If it rolls in your direction your chances of survival diminish.
2. Dive away, and go face down. Do not run from a grenade, which has just landed, because you don't know when it will explode. You may be struck with fragments (shrapnel) while trying to flee or get spun in the air by the shock front. Although grenades have timer fuses, there is no telling when it will go off. Some fuses are designed to go off in two seconds, while others go off in four seconds. If the thrower wants to take no chances of someone picking up the grenade to throw it back, or to throw it into a safe area, they do a technique called "cooking." They pull the pin, let the grenade cook off for a second or two, and then throw it. This technique allows the grenade to burst in the air, or explode upon immediate contact with the ground giving the victims no chance to react.
3. Point your legs toward the grenade and bring your heels together. Your legs should be like an arrow pointing to the grenade, while your feet are the arrowhead. By playing the soles of your shoes together it acts as a shield between the rest of your body and the device. If shrapnel does come your way, hopefully your shoes, feet, and legs will absorb it before it penetrates vital organs.
4. Bring your elbows to the side of your rib cage and cover your ears with your hands. By using your arms to cover your torso, and your hands to cover your head, you are using your limbs as a buffer between flying debris and vital areas of your body.
5. Close your eyes and open your mouth. When a grenade explodes there is a shock front (also known as a shock wave) that expands outward from the center. This sudden high-pressure area moving

through the atmosphere can rupture your eardrums and your lungs if you are close enough (it takes only 80 p.s.i. to rupture the lungs). By keeping your mouth open you are attempting to equalize the outside pressure with your internal air cavities to avoid a rupture.

Car and Truck Bombs

Historically the first use of car and truck bombs as a regular means of terrorist attacks begins in 1981 in the Middle East, although it was the Old IRA (Irish Republican Ireland) who invented the car bomb in the 1920s. On April 25, 1981 a car bomb kills seven people and injures 35 in Kermanshah, Iran. Then, just four months later there is a rash of such bombings. On August 31st a car bomb wounds 23 persons at the U.S. Air Force Base in Ramstein, Germany. Taking responsibility for the bombing was the terrorist group German Red Army. On September 3rd a car bomb explodes in front of the Syrian Air Force Headquarters in Damascus killing 23 and wounding 50. On September 17th a car bomb explodes in Sidon, Lebanon killing 23. The terrorist group called the Front for the Liberation of Lebanon from Foreigners takes the credit. On September 18th the same group explodes another car in West Beirut on a public street. On September 28th a car bomb explodes at a Palestinian checkpoint in Zrariyeh, Lebanon killing 15 at a nearby restaurant. From then on it's just one car bombing after another.

The reason car and truck bombs have become so popular among terrorist organizations is the ability to load up the vehicle with explosives, drive right up to the target, abandon the vehicle if they are not a suicide bomber, and detonate it at the desired time. Of course a terrorist is going to detonate the device when the most people are around, this means at rush hour or when the most people possible are inside a desired location. When American terrorist Timothy McVeigh blew up the Alfred E. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma he did it at 9:03 am; the starting time for work for most Americans. Although not related to car or truck bombings, but to timing, it is important to note that when the terrorist used American Airlines Flight 11 to crash into the north tower of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 they chose the time of 8:47 a.m. Minutes later United Airlines Flight 175 slammed into the south tower at 9:02 a.m. Then American Airlines Flight 77 struck the Pentagon, America's military headquarters, at 9:41 a.m. In Madrid's recent tragedy the attacks were timed at 7:39 a.m. at the Atocha station, when most Spaniards are going to work, 7:44 a.m. at the same location, 7:54 a.m. at the El Pozo station, and at 7:49 a.m. when a commuter train was entering Santa Eugenia station. Then there was the London train bombings in July of 2005 and the Indian train bombings this year. When it comes to any possible large scale terrorist attack you must be cognizant of the time.

If you ever see a suspicious vehicle, or someone who seems to abandon a vehicle in an unusual place, like the entrance to a populated place, it is best to go with your suspicions and phone the police or notify the local security. If, on the other hand, you suspect that your own vehicle could have been tampered with, and someone planted an explosive device, here are some tips on how to search your own vehicle:

1. A simple, systematic search of a vehicle can be broken down into five areas:
 - a) Exterior (including the exhaust pipe, wheel wells, behind bumpers & hub caps, etc.)
 - b) Underneath (especially around the fuel tank, back side of the wheels)
 - c) Interior (underneath the carpet and seats, inside air ducts, behind door trims, etc.)
 - d) Trunk (around the spare tire, side panels, tool box, etc.)
 - e) Engine (the battery can be used as a source of electricity for a bomb)

Public Transportation Bombs

Any public transportation system can be a terrorist target: aircraft, trains, buses, or ferries. For the majority future attacks the terrorists are going to bring the weapon aboard and plant it somewhere; as opposed to being an employee and having ample time to conceal it in a secure area.

Since America's horrific attack in 2001, airlines have obviously stepped up security at airports, as well as other nations following suit. However, as we all know, other modes of transportation are softer targets, and there are simply not enough security personnel to cover every possible strike points. Prevention (Pre-Conflict) is obviously the key to survival. Detecting suspicious behavior in someone or detecting a suspicious object and reporting it is something the Israelis have grown accustomed to, and the awareness of their general population has prevented countless attacks.

Here are some common sense Reality-Based pointers whenever you are using a public transportation

system:

- Always look around for backpacks, luggage, or packages that have been left behind before you take your seat. Don't assume somebody simply "forgot" it. If you find such a container don't be afraid to get an attendant to check it out and get it off. Be responsible for your own area.
- Always observe the people who are aboard with you, and how people get on and off. You don't have to be paranoid or obvious that you are observing people, but a little casual awareness goes a long way. If you see someone, who appears slightly nervous or crafty, and leaves behind something, then you must take some sort of action, even if it means moving further forward or back away from the possible blast zone and notifying the proper authorities. Self preservation is the number one rule.
- When you use lavatories make it a habit to check behind spaces and inside of openings for any IED that may have been planted. Over the past few years many citizens searching aircraft lavatories have come across conventional weapons such as knives, box cutter, and guns. Such weapons may indicate a pending attack.
- Most bus and rail explosions occur in the middle of the interior. If it is a suicide bombing where the terrorist fears discovery the explosion will also occur near the entrance. The "safest" place would be to the rear of a train car or a bus. If it is a commuter train that you are taking you may want to sit in the last car. Most people tend to take the first few cars and the middle cars before they would a rear car just because of the inconvenience of longer walk. Terrorist tend to attack "center mass" (the most concentration of people).
- Try to position yourself near an exit. After an explosion does occur, you may have to escape to avoid smoke inhalation or a rapidly moving fire. For my students I always recommend that they carry an emergency escape hood designed to filter out toxins in the air in the event of a fire or terrorist attack (including chemical attacks).
- Try to avoid busy hours. For travel by air it may be safer, and less expensive, to catch a late night or early morning flight where there are less people and passengers. It's obvious that rail systems, especially subways, are vulnerable targets. By avoiding peak hours you will keep yourself away from a potential attack. A smart terrorist is not likely going to waste his time on a few people. The whole purpose of terrorism is to get media attention. The more casualties, the bigger the media coverage.

Suicide Bombers

Suicide bombers, also called Shaheed (Arabic for Holy Warrior), are definitely the most difficult type of terrorist to stop, yet not impossible. The problem with suicide bombers are that they go to great lengths to blend in with their surrounds. They can look like the nice girl or boy next door, or they can be dressed in a convincing disguise. They will look and act natural, but deep down inside their gut it is very difficult for them to contain their anxiety or euphoria - the eyes, being the window to one's soul, will give them away. According to former Israeli Intelligence Officer, Major Avi Nardia, you will know who the suicide bomber is because "You can see it in their face". (Countering Suicide Terrorism Conference, Los Angeles, California June 27, 2003 Major Nardia's video tape KAPAP / LOTAR is also available through Budo magazine). Going into a crowd of people with the sole purpose of blowing oneself up is not a natural human thing to do. It takes a lot of training and desensitization before someone willingly crosses that line. As a result the terrorist may display nervousness, profuse sweating, constant scanning for fear of being discovered, a distance stare or even appear to be under the influence of a controlled substance to numb his or her natural sensibilities. It is at this stage where you have the greatest ability to detect a possible attack (the Pre-Conflict phase using visual indicators). Even if a terrorist is not wearing a bomb belt or packing explosives in a backpack at the time, he may be just doing surveillance for a future attack. Obviously if this is the case he or she may be slightly more relaxed, and thus harder to detect.

Some of the likely targets that a suicide bomber will select are:

- Public transportation
- Malls or the entrance to a mall if security is tight
- Sporting event
- Place of worship
- Police station or other government building
- Crowded Restaurant
- National Monument or tourist attraction
- Police or security check point (last ditch effort before discovery)

For the scope of this article we will stay on the topic of public transportation attacks. Since a suicide bomber will have to physically carry the explosives, along with the nuts, bolts, and nails that are usually wrapped around the explosive to create shrapnel, there will be some bulk to the package. Thus a suicide bomber will either wear the bomb, commonly called a "bomb belt" or transport it through some kind of carry bag or package. Of course visual indicators will be things such as a person wearing bulky clothing that conceals the device, clothing that is buttoned or zipped up tight, clutching onto or nervously handling something in his or her hand or pocket (such as a detonating trigger or mobile phone), or a disguise that doesn't look quite right (perhaps a military or police uniform that is not worn correctly).

If you are in a situation where a suicide bomber blows him or herself up, and you survive or happened to have been at a distance, the most important thing to remember is not to go rush into the scene and start helping people, even though that is a natural tendency. The general rule is, if there is one suicide bomber, there is a secondary bomber waiting for the first responders to give assistance. You, now being trained, will immediately start scanning the crowds or those nearby to determine if any of them might be the second or even third attacker. You may not be able to stop other people from rushing in, but you do not have to be a casualty yourself. It's a hard call for anyone to have to make, especially if you see people suffering, but you must keep your mind tactical.

Knowledge into Practice

Like any fighting or survival skills, you must train in order for it to become a natural response. All of the advice that I have given to you in this article can be implemented into your martial arts training. Now, I specifically teach a seminar course called TERRORISM SURVIVAL, however you can take my teachings in sections and include it into your schedule. Let's take a typical martial arts school as an example.

When teaching about car and truck bombs you can park a suspicious vehicle in front of the school that nobody has seen before, and see if anyone notices. For bomb searches inside of a building you can have an assistant instructor call the school, having a student answer the phone at a specific time, in order to call in a bomb threat. You can then have the rest of the students use the searching methods that I described to search for an IED. Prior to class you could plant some home-made devices that are nothing more than little boxes with some nails tape around them or a pipe with pipe caps on each end hidden in the bottom of a trash can to appear like a pipe bomb. For the suicide bomber you can teach your students how to effectively take down someone who is about to "explode" a device or it has failed to detonate do to a malfunction.

There are many training lessons that can be made from this article. Although the chances of being attacked are less likely than being hit by lightning, the fact is that there is still a likelihood that it can happen, and you need to be ready for it. By training for bombing threats, or teaching it to others, you begin to understand what the Reality-Based Self-Defense system is all about.

About the author

Jim Wagner (awarded the Black Belt Hall of Fame Self-Defense Instructor of the Year 2006) is a law enforcement officer in the United States, and a former counterterrorist who participated in 146 missions after 9/11. He is also the founder of the Reality-Based Self-Defense system for civilians. For more information contact: www.jimwagnerrealitybased.com

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