

EVOLVING TERRORISM

MINDS ON

Shortly after a man identifying himself as Muslim seized a café in Sydney — taking 18 hostages in the process — a passenger riding a train noticed a woman removing her hijab. The hijab is a head and neck scarf worn by Muslim women as an expression of modesty and devotion to Islam. The fellow passenger implored her to put the hijab back on and vowed to walk with her to prevent any unwanted attention or abuse directed at her just because she was Muslim. News of this act of solidarity made its way to Twitter and soon #illridewithyou began trending as Australians of various backgrounds began to pledge their support for the Muslim community.

What does this story tell you about the people of Australia? Would the same thing happen in Canada?

SETTING THE STAGE

It was as if the world was approaching a precipice with a complete descent into madness resting just over the edge of the cliff. Shocking attacks in Australia, Pakistan, and France reminded the world that terrorism remains a global threat that is evolving (or perhaps “devolving” is a more appropriate word) into more grisly and unpredictable forms.

Canadian prelude

Two attacks on Canadian soil in the fall of 2014 may have acted as a prelude for what was to come. Within a few days in October, “lone



wolf” attacks targeting the Canadian military and government put the nation on alert. First, a deranged man, known to authorities for his desire to fight with the ISIS terrorist army, drove his car toward two Canadian Forces soldiers walking through a parking lot in a town just outside of Montreal. He managed to kill one soldier and injure the other. Next, a gunman opened fire at the National War Memorial in Ottawa, killing a soldier before traveling a short distance and storming Canada’s Parliament. He came uncomfortably close to a room where the prime minister was meeting with his caucus and another where the opposition leader was meeting with his colleagues. Security personnel eventually shot him dead. The attacks came shortly after Canada announced its intention to join the fight against ISIS.

A flurry of attacks

Then, after a relatively calm November, a flurry of terrorist attacks of varying kinds grabbed the world’s attention. First, a gunman entered a café in Sydney, Australia, taking 18 hostages. A 16-hour standoff followed with the police eventually entering the café after the gunman is believed to have killed a hostage. Sadly, a second hostage was accidentally killed by police as they staged their rescue.

The next day, heavily armed Taliban insurgents stormed a military school in Peshawar, Pakistan. The attack was meticulously planned and resulted in the murder of 132 children between the ages of eight and 18. Ten staff members and three soldiers also died in the attack. Pakistani special forces brought an end to the crisis after entering the school compound and killing all of the seven gunmen who entered the school that morning.

Then, a few weeks later, two brothers attacked the editorial offices of Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris, France. The gunmen executed 12 people in retaliation for the magazine's publication of anti-Islamic cartoons and articles. The two men fled the scene but were eventually located and shot by police after a brief exchange of gunfire. Meanwhile, a comrade of the Charlie Hebdo killers entered a Jewish supermarket, took several hostages, and demanded the safe release of the two brothers. Police managed to kill the man but not before he took the lives of four hostages.

The common denominator

The similarity in all of these attacks seems to be the ascendance of radical Islamic extremism. At the very least, organizations like ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Taliban have managed to inspire individuals and groups to embark on a fresh wave of horrific assaults on the peace and stability of innocent people around the globe. What frightens authorities most is their inability to predict when and where the attacks might come from next.

The Sydney café attack took place on December 14 and 15, 2014. The Peshawar school massacre took place on December 16, 2014. Three weeks later, beginning on January 7 and ending on January 9, 2015, two attacks occurred in Paris: one in and around the offices of Charlie Hebdo and the other at the Hyper Cacher kosher supermarket.

To consider

1. Why might the attacks in Canada be seen as a prelude of things to come?
2. How do the attacks in Australia, Pakistan and France differ? How are they similar?
3. What is the common denominator in the most recent cluster of terrorist attacks?
4. What do authorities fear the most?

VIDEO REVIEW

Pre-viewing

1. In a column written for Time magazine, a prominent Muslim and former NBA superstar posited:

When the Ku Klux Klan burn a cross in a black family's yard, prominent Christians aren't required to explain how these aren't really Christian acts. Most people already realize that the KKK doesn't represent Christian teachings. That's what I and other Muslims long for — the day when these terrorists praising the Prophet Mohammad or Allah's name as they debase their actual teachings are instantly recognized as thugs disguising themselves as Muslims. It's like bank robbers wearing masks of presidents; we don't really think Jimmy Carter or George W. Bush hit the Bank of America during their down time.

– Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, TIME, January 9, 2015

What point is Abdul-Jabbar trying to make? Do you agree with his position? Are Muslims being unfairly targeted in the way the media report terrorism?

While viewing

1. What happened in Paris in early January? Which terrorist organization inspired the attacks?

2. What was the connection between the Kouachi brothers' attack and the supermarket attack in east Paris?

3. How were the two terrorist incidents resolved?

4. What warning did French President Francois Hollande give to the people of France?

5. Why were security analysts particularly alarmed by the two attacks in Paris?

6. Why was cartoonist Stéphane Charbonnier placed on an al-Qaeda hit list?

7. How do the Paris attacks differ from the attacks in Canada and Australia?

8. What evidence did Australian authorities have that Man Haron Monis was a potential threat to society?

9. What similarities do authorities in Canada and Australia face in the fight against terrorism?

10. a) What happened in Pakistan the day after the incident in Australia?

b) Who was responsible for the attack?

c) Who was the target of the attack? Who wound up being the victims of the attack?

11. Why does scholar Michael Kugelman think that the West needs to pay more attention to al-Qaeda?

12. What is the goal of ISIS? What do they hope to accomplish?

13. Why does Michael Kugelman worry that the situation may get much worse before it gets better?

Post-viewing

In an interview with CBC’s Adrienne Arseneault, U.S. Secretary of Homeland Security Jeh Johnson said, “The new phenomenon that I’m very concerned about is somebody who has never met another member of that terrorist organization, never trained at one of the camps, who is simply inspired by the propaganda, the message to commit an act of violence.”

Why do you think Johnson is very concerned about the type of attacks he is describing? Are these types of attacks becoming more of reality? How can the authorities prevent these kinds of attacks?

STOPPING THE LONE WOLF

It's not like they weren't known to police:

Martin Couture-Rouleau had become so withdrawn and distant — and so obsessed with radical Islamic ideology — that his father called the police for help. A month after the call, the RCMP arrested Couture-Rouleau as he was trying to board a plane bound for Turkey. They believed his eventual destination would be a terrorist training camp in Syria so they seized his passport and told him to go home. They put him on the RCMP watch list and began monitoring his movements. However, they weren't watching the day Couture-Rouleau ran down two Canadian Forces soldiers with his car in a Quebec parking lot, killing one and injuring the other. Couture-Rouleau was later killed by police after a brief car chase.

Michael Zehaf-Bibeau battled addiction and mental health issues for most of his adult life. He had many run-ins with the law. Zehaf-Bibeau embraced a radical form of Islam — so radical in fact that he got kicked out of the B.C. mosque that he attended regularly. Eventually, he left B.C. and made his way to Ontario. He tried to get a passport but his erratic behaviour drew the

attention of authorities and his application was held up to scrutiny. While his passport sat in limbo, Zehaf-Bibeau made his way to Ottawa and killed a soldier standing guard at the National War Memorial before storming Parliament Hill. Security personnel in the Parliament building managed to corner Zehaf-Bibeau and kill him.

Man Haron Monis, an Iranian refugee who immigrated to Australia, gained notoriety for sending hate mail to the families of Australian soldiers killed in Afghanistan. The police and the media took note of his extremist beliefs but believed he was just seeking attention. He got into trouble with the law in 2013 when police charged him with accessory to the murder of his ex-wife. A self-proclaimed Muslim cleric, Monis was also under indictment for 40 sexual assaults, presumably on some of his followers. Man Haron Monis brought a rifle to a Sydney café one December morning, took 22 hostages, and stood his ground for 16 hours. Police eventually moved in but not before Monis killed a hostage. Unfortunately, one other hostage was killed by police bullets while they were taking down Monis.

To consider

Canada recently passed new anti-terrorism legislation. The new law gives the authorities the right to:

- Hold secret hearings into alleged terror suspects
- Detain people they suspect of terrorism for up to three days
- Punish people who travel to terrorist training camps overseas
- Punish people who take part in terrorist plots overseas or flee to Canada after committing a terrorist act
- Administer wiretaps on terror suspects with limited restrictions
- Punish people who harbour terrorists (up to 14 years in prison)

1. Do these provisions go far enough?
2. Would this law have helped in the cases indicated above?
3. What additional laws would help in the fight against terrorism?
4. Should a person's Charter rights be suspended if they take part in terrorist acts?
5. How do you prevent "lone wolf" attacks?

JUSTIFYING MURDER

It is hard for rational and conscientious people to make sense of terrorist attacks. The decision to take the lives of defenceless and unarmed people is beyond the realm of reason. However, that doesn't stop people from trying to explain why terrorists embark on their macabre journeys.

Peshawar School Shooting – December 2014

On December 16, 2014, seven members of Pakistan's Taliban donned stolen army uniforms and stormed the Army Public School in Peshawar. The initial burst of gunfire led to panic as the gunmen attacked while many of the students were gathered in the school's auditorium writing exams. After inflicting as much damage as possible, they moved through the school and continued their killing spree. This went on until Pakistani security forces arrived and began the seven hour process of attacking and containing the terrorists. Eventually all seven men were killed but not before they murdered 145 people — including 132 students between the ages of 8 and 18, 10 staff members and three soldiers.

While the attack was taking place, a spokesman for the Pakistan Taliban said the attack was an act of revenge for the casualties resulting from a Pakistani army offensive against the group that started the previous summer. One analyst claimed that attack was also inspired, at least in part, by the awarding to the Nobel Peace Prize to Malala Yousafzai the previous week. Malala, an outspoken advocate for girl's education, was shot in the head by the Taliban while she rode a bus to school with her friends. She was just 15 years old when she was attacked in 2012.

The school attack was the worst terrorist incident in Pakistan's history.

Paris under attack – January 2015

In January 2015, two brothers, Said and Cherif Kouachi, decided the magazine Charlie Hebdo needed to pay for its anti-Muslim rhetoric and its blasphemous depictions of the Prophet Muhammad (strictly forbidden in Islam) in satirical cartoons. After receiving weapons training and indoctrination through al-Qaeda operatives in Yemen, the brothers returned to France and began to live out their lives. One January morning they decided to put their weapons training to work and forced their way into Charlie Hebdo headquarters. They proceeded to let off 50 rounds, killing 10 and injuring 11. Once they finished their attack, they shouted, "God is Great!" and "The Prophet is avenged!" As they exited the building they shot and killed two police officers before disappearing.

Meanwhile, Amedy Coulibaly, a comrade of the Kouachi's, decided to embark on his own attack. First, just a few hours after the Charlie Hebdo massacre, Coulibaly shot and injured a jogger making his way down a street close to his home. The next morning he shot and killed a police officer on traffic duty and injured a city street cleaner. Finally, he made his way to a kosher grocery store, shot four people dead and took a number of hostages. He told police that he would kill more people if the Kouachi brothers were harmed.

For their part, the brothers had dodged police and eventually found refuge in a printing shop close to Charles De Galle airport. Ultimately the police decided to meet the brothers and their comrade in grocery store head on. They stormed the two locations and all three terrorist were killed.

Reflection question

1. Can you find a rational reason to explain the attacks? The Peshawar attack was on defenceless school children. The people at Charlie Hebdo headquarters were gathered together for a story meeting. The people killed in the kosher supermarket were picking up Friday groceries in preparation for the Sabbath. What possible reason could the terrorists have for going to the extreme of murdering their fellow human beings? (Note: If you find these questions impossible to answer, please indicate that in your answer.)

Followup

A few days after the three terrorists killed 17 and injured 20 in separate attacks in Paris, almost four million people took part in demonstrations across France, proclaiming “We are Charlie” (Je suis Charlie) in reference to the murder of journalists at Charlie Hebdo headquarters. Charlie Hebdo is a magazine that has consistently demonstrated a willingness to satirize anyone and anything they feel like satirizing. At one point the magazine printed cartoons that depicted the Prophet Muhammad — an act that goes directly against the teachings of Islam and one that offended millions of Muslims around the world. In fact, the magazine did the same thing on the cover of their post-attack issue — artwork that many news organizations around the world refused to publish, post or show in their reports. While no one in their right mind would believe the Kouachi brothers were justified in embarking on their horrific attack, many wondered if the “Je suis Charlie” chant elevated the magazine to the status of “icon of freedom” despite the fact that it had deeply offended a significant portion of the French population.

- a) Should there be limits on what a magazine can or cannot publish?
- b) “Is nothing sacred?” is a common question posed by people in the aftermath of seeing or hearing something they deem offensive. What do you think: is nothing sacred?