

A grayscale illustration of a dense crowd of people. In the lower center, a person is highlighted in a vibrant red color, standing out from the monochrome background. The crowd consists of various individuals of different ages and expressions, some looking towards the viewer and others looking away.

× 30

COVER STORY | BY MICHAEL A. GIPS

A THREAT

ILLUSTRATION BY GORDON STUDER

IN THE CROWD

Though there is no textbook profile of a suicide bomber, there are trademark actions and behaviors. The warning signs of an attack, known as “telltale indicators,” manifest themselves when a person is being deceptive.

SOMETHING DIDN'T FEEL RIGHT

BODY LANGUAGE

Something didn't feel right. A young man was skulking around the entrance of Mike's Place, an American-themed Tel Aviv seaside bar and restaurant, as if he were trying to avoid the line of vision of security officer Avi Tabib, who was posted at the door. The man's roundabout movements were odd enough that Tabib, knowing that Mike's Place would be an attractive terrorist target as a hangout for diplomats from the U.S. embassy next door, broke off his conversation with a waitress to study the man more closely. The man eventually approached the door.

"Something about his body language...his eyes...bothered me and I didn't like it," the guard later recalled. "Something about his stubbornness and defensive aggression really ticked me off. His eyes signaled trouble."

The signs of trouble were enough for Tabib to turn the man away. But the man circled back and tried to rush past Tabib into the bar. Tabib, a martial arts aficionado, tackled him at the hip, and an explosive belt detonated, killing the attacker, the waitress, and two other men, but, miraculously, not Tabib.

CLOTHING

Something didn't feel right. Although he had been in Israel for only several months, Mikhail Sarkisov intuited that this was no typical patron looking to enter the seaside coffee shop. On a steamy Friday Tel Aviv evening, he was wearing a bulky jacket up top and shorts on the bottom, exposing his spindly legs. When Sarkisov, a

I KNOW WHAT A BOMB IS. I WAS AN OFFICER IN THE RUSSIAN ARMY.

former Russian policeman and soldier, wanded him, the man went off like a church bell.

"I asked him, 'What's that?' And he said, 'It's mine,'" Sarkisov told the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*.

"I said, 'I didn't ask whose it was, I said, what is it?'" Sarkisov recalled.

"He put his hand in his pocket. I know what a bomb is. I was an officer in the Russian army."

Sarkisov grabbed for the attacker's hand, and the man took off toward the U.S. Embassy. Sarkisov chased after him, yelling "terrorist!" Officers working at the embassy combined with Sarkisov to subdue the attacker and prevent him from detonating his bomb, which was packed with six pounds of nuts and bolts to maximize carnage.

BEHAVIOR

Something didn't feel right. An 18-year-old man, in a baseball cap and wearing a backpack on his chest, was wheeling a piece of luggage through the lobby of the luxurious JW Marriott hotel in Jakarta toward a lounge where a group of regional CEOs were gathering for breakfast. He seemed to have tunnel vision—oblivious to activity around him, focused on his destination. Suspicious, guards stopped him from entering the lounge.

"I want to see my boss," the young man told the officers, according to an indictment issued against a conspirator in the attack.

"Which one is your boss? What's his name?" one of the officers asked.

"I just want to deliver something to my boss," the attacker insisted.

Eventually, a hotel clerk who had come over to see what was going on relented to the man's pleas. Moments later, a blast ripped through the hotel, killing six and wounded dozens. Another bomb ripped through the Ritz Carlton hotel across the street shortly thereafter as part of a coordinated strike.

THREE CASES in which "something didn't feel right." Two in which security personnel trusted their training and senses and prevented larger tragedies. One in which nonsecurity staff disregarded warning signs identified by security officers.

These "somethings," explains David Harel, weren't just abstract, ethereal hunches. Harel, managing director and vice president of ASERO Worldwide, a global consultancy specializing in security and risk management with a special focus on Israel, says that the sense of foreboding was triggered by specific acts and behaviors that were difficult to completely articulate at the moment—a movement, a look, a tone, a gesture. "The indicators were there," says Harel, who previously held high-level positions at the Israeli Security Agency (ISA). "They just might not have been sure what they were at the time."

While suicide terrorism is a relatively infrequent *modus operandi*—the 2014 *Global Terrorism Index* indicates that less than 5 percent of all terrorist incidents worldwide since 2000 have been suicide attacks—it is a quickly growing phenomenon. From 1982 through May 2015, there were 4,568 suicide attacks worldwide, according to the Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism (CPOST), a research institute based at the University of Chicago. And 2014 represented a high-water mark of attacks with 545. Unsurprisingly, they are particularly lethal. According to CPOST, the average attack killed 10 people and wounded 26 others. Data compiled by ASERO show that although a mere 0.6 percent of terrorist attacks in Israel between late 2000 and 2008 were suicide bombings, this tiny fraction accounted for half of all terrorism fatalities in that country.

What's more, suicide attacks are spreading beyond the typical theatres of Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan,

and Syria. “In Europe, in general, we are about to see more suicide terrorism,” predicts Zori Kor, an ASERO vice president. “You can simply walk to wherever there are a lot of people. It is more efficient than a bag left at an airport or on a corner.” Many other analysts agree, pointing to the likely return to Europe of hundreds of jihadist fighters who will be bringing home tactics from Syria.

Moreover, suicide attacks are becoming more sophisticated, as terrorists share techniques and technology on the Internet. For example, in March of this year, four suicide bombers killed 142 and wounded 351 worshipers when they detonated bombs at two mosques in Sana’a, Yemen. The attacks were so deadly partly because secondary devices targeted the fleeing masses.

Because of the violence engendered by the religious, political, economic, and historic strife in the country and the surrounding region, Israel’s approach to security is extraordinary—security doesn’t need to show a bottom line, deliver a return on investment, or take on ancillary areas such as customer service or maintenance. Every threat is considered existential, and security always has a seat at the table—often at the head of the table. In addition, Israel’s small dimensions—it is frequently compared to New Jersey in size—allow it to impose much stricter measures and cultivate in its population a much stronger awareness of threats than larger nations can achieve.

Still, many of the approaches and techniques used in that country—in this case with regard to suicide bombings—offer lessons to businesses, governments, and other institutions around the world. That’s especially so because today’s terrorists, and their causes and techniques, routinely cross borders, notes Kor.

Israel frequently thwarts suicide attacks, but it hasn’t always been so proficient. The Jewish nation “failed early” when faced with new terrorism techniques, says Doron

Bergerbest-Eilon, founder, president, and CEO of ASERO. “We learned from our failures and came in with practical solutions,” he continues. Bergerbest-Eilon developed those years of experience as the head of the protection and security division and the senior ranking security official at the ISA.

“Because we started early, we are in many ways more advanced than the rest of the world,” he says.

For example, during the Second Intifada, from 2000-2005, Israel was struck more than 140 times by suicide bombers. The numbers have plummeted since then—replaced by

ENHANCING EARLY DETECTION

ASERO experts say there are seven key factors that can lead to early detection of would-be bombers.



KNOW

your home territory

DEPLOY

effectively



REVIEW

case studies

READ

body language



EMPLOY

risk management principles eliminating low-threat groups

ENGAGE

the community to increase eyes and ears



ASSUME

a “hunter” mindset, not a “fisherman” mindset. That is, aggressively look for TTIs rather than just passively waiting to notice them

incidents of shootings, stabbings, and car rampages—because of Israel’s effective response to the threat. That response has included detailed human and technical intelligence, a border fence at the West Bank, widespread surveillance, public education, and close collaboration between public and private security forces, among other factors.

But what happens when an attacker slips by this web of defense and is bearing down on a target? Though there is no textbook profile of a suicide bomber, there are trademark actions and behaviors that Bergerbest-Eilon and his ASERO colleagues have documented. ASERO calls the warning signs of an attack “telltale indicators,” or TTIs. Harel explains that TTIs manifest themselves, or “leak,” when a person is being deceptive. Cognitive and emotional dissonance, he says,

result in increased brain activity, which can be seen in thermal images.

MODEL OF DECEPTION

Absent access to brain scans, security screeners can apply a four-part model. Harel uses an ABCD categorization for TTIs: appearance, behavior and belongings, context, and documentation.

APPEARANCE. Consider shoe-bomber Richard Reid. One of his sub-duers, a man named Kwame James, was asked by a CNN interviewer why he had noticed Reid on the plane prior to the attack. James said: “Just his long, scraggly hair, just his appearance in general. I mean, usually Paris is a very fashion-conscious city, and usually when you’re flying on those longer flights from Paris to Miami or to New York, whatever,

everybody is pretty well-dressed, and he definitely wasn’t.”

A rough-hewn appearance among smartly attired people is a certain TTI. Others could be irregular bunching under clothes, excessive or oversized clothing, inappropriate dress for time or season, and style of dress in contradiction to a stated profession or position. Also, clothing may seem to be holding excessive weight.

BEHAVIOR AND BELONGINGS.

Before two women blew themselves up at an entrance to a rock concert at the Tushino Airfield outside Moscow in 2003, their agitation was visible. On Christmas Day in 2009, Nigerian national Umar Farouk Abdul Mutallab checked in to his flight from Amsterdam to Detroit, a flight he would attempt to blow up. He failed to check a bag, even though his itinerary



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indicated that he would be staying in wintry Michigan for two weeks. Before Yigal Amir assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, Amir's carriage and behavior while lying in wait—including repeatedly sitting and standing, sidling, and walking backwards—caught the attention of a videographer who was capturing the prime minister's appearance from a nearby roof. Asked why the video keeps coming back to the assassin in the crowded scene, the videographer said, "I said to myself, suppose there is somebody here who is going to commit a murder.... He looked like that kind of person."

Israeli police, security, and the public are trained to look for irregular behavior in relation to time, place, and circumstance. This might include nervousness or anxiety, heavy sweating, rigid or unnatural movements, a detached air or blank stare, furtive glances, acute focus (as in the previously mentioned Jakarta hotel attack), and avoidance of eye contact with security personnel.

For example, security and pedestrians shortcircuited a potentially far more dangerous attack when they noticed a man holding a bag and walking with a stiff gait toward the main entrance of the the Sharon Mall in the Israeli coastal town of Netanya in December 2005. According to an account in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, a witness saw a man walking "like a robot" to the mall. A woman shouted to the guards at the entrance to the shopping center, "Suicide bomber! Suicide bomber!" A guard grabbed the man and pulled him away from the entrance, while police rushed over to assist. The attacker detonated the explosives in the bag, killing the guard and four others, and wounding more than 50. Authorities said the toll would have been much higher had the terrorist entered the mall.

CONTEXT. Why would a financially struggling, pregnant Irish chambermaid make a last-minute ticket

purchase to fly from London to Tel Aviv alone? Ann Marie Murphy told El Al authorities that her Jordanian fiancé wanted the lovers to marry in Israel and had sent her ahead, and that she was staying at the Hilton, one of the most expensive hotels in the country. She claimed to have been given a free room because of her occupation—though it was highly unlikely that a deluxe hotel would extend a free room to housekeeping staff. Nor could she verify her hotel reservations or identify any friends or relatives she would be seeing in Israel.

Turns out her "fiancé," Nezar Hindawi, had planted more than 3 pounds of Semtex in her bag with the intent of taking down the

ISRAEL AT KNIFEPOINT



AS THIS ISSUE WAS GOING TO PRESS, knife attacks by Palestinians were taking place throughout Israel. ASERO's Harel credits the substitution of knives for explosives to Israel's dismantling of terror infrastructures. But officials have been expressing concern that this activity will spark a third intifada—and perhaps a return to the frequent suicide bombings that ravaged the nation a decade ago.

Much more difficult to detect than terrorists wearing explosives-laden vests, attackers with knives generally don't have to get weapons across borders, and these assailants fit in with their surroundings. Harel says that Israel has responded with heavy security in the streets, as well as diplomatic attempts to reduce the tension around the Al Aqsa mosque, which triggered the new violence.

Israel's defense minister, Moshe Ya'alon, recently advised citizens to always be on the alert. News outlets have reported a surge in membership in self-defense classes, applications for gun permits, and sales of pepper spray. Self-defense experts are offering general pieces of advice, such as using both hands to grab an attacker's knife-wielding hand, and yelling loudly for help.

flight—and getting rid of an unwanted girlfriend and unborn child.

The Murphy case is a classic example of an unlikely context serving as the key to exposing a suicide bombing plot.

DOCUMENTATION. Another indicator of an attack might be poor, questionable, or counterfeit documentation such as passports, driver's licenses, or work permits. Harel points to a 2012 suicide attack by a bomber on a passenger bus carrying Israeli tourists at the Burgas Airport in Bulgaria. There were sufficient anomalies, he says—waiting in the arrival hall for a charter flight, carrying a heavy backpack even though it had wheels—for authorities to investigate. Had they asked for ID, they would have seen that he was carrying a Michigan driver's license that had a Baton Rouge, Louisiana, address. It also listed the man, who video stills suggest stood about six feet tall, as five foot two. Ironically, days before, the man had been turned down when trying to rent a car because his identification looked suspicious.

It's been reported that poor documentation contributed to the capture of the Millennium Bomber, who tried to cross from Canada to the United States to attack the Los Angeles International Airport. After being pulled from his car by a Customs agent, the bomber handed over two Quebec driver's licenses with the same birthdates but in different names.

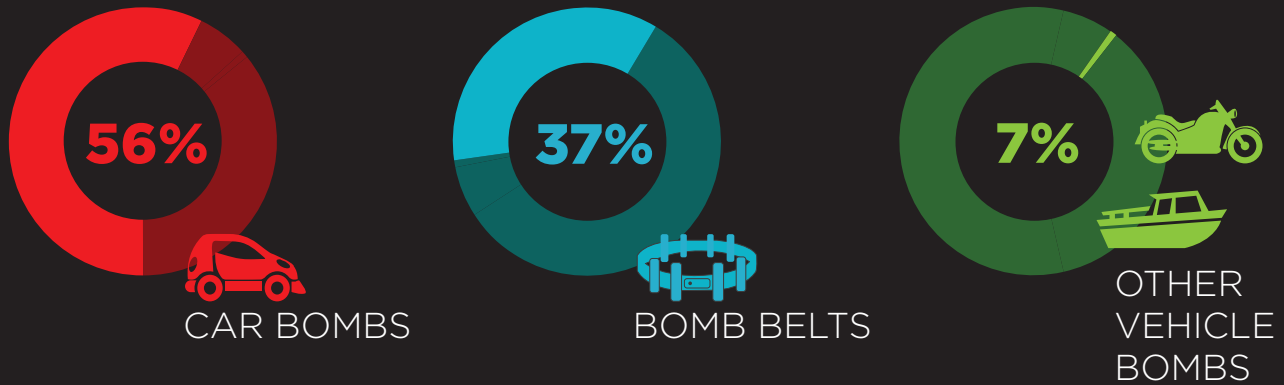
Up-to-date intelligence, prompt information sharing, and public awareness are key to thwarting suicide attacks, as the Israeli model shows. Should an attacker get to his or her target, the use of telltale indicators by officers and passersby can mean the difference between mass casualties and a great sigh of relief. ■

MICHAEL A. GIPS IS VICE PRESIDENT, PUBLISHING AT ASIS INTERNATIONAL.

10 YEARS OF TERROR

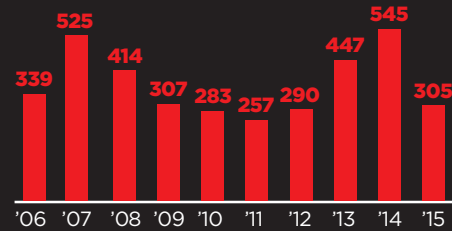
A STUDY OF GLOBAL SUICIDE ATTACKS BY THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO INDICATES THAT INCIDENTS ARE INCREASING WORLDWIDE.

TYPE OF WEAPON



WORLDWIDE SUICIDE ATTACKS SINCE 2006

3,712



TOTAL DEATHS
33,421

AVG. DEATHS PER ATTACK
9

TOTAL WOUNDED
79,014

AVG. WOUNDED PER ATTACK
21.3

SUICIDE ATTACK TARGETS >>



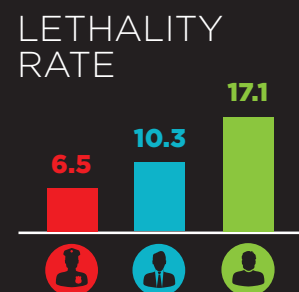
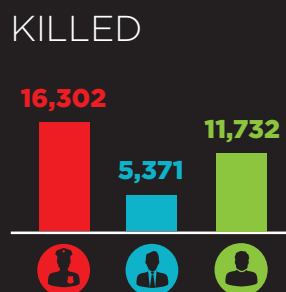
SECURITY



POLITICAL



CIVILIAN



SOURCE: The Chicago Project on Security and Terrorism. Data posted is as of September 30, 2015.