Mitigation of Terrorist Effects
On Victims’ Motivation

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Leaders at all levels can look to the basic theory of human motivational needs for a framework to understand the fear and despair among the general population as a consequence of terrorism that makes the general population the real victims. National level policy makers, in addition to local public leaders, can capitalize on the same theory to provide a framework for implementing a strategy to deal with and mitigate these fears which result from terrorism.

The effects of terrorism can be understood by viewing these fears in the context of Abraham H. Maslow’s basic motivational theory. Using this insight, leaders can take relatively simple and inexpensive actions to mitigate the results of terrorism.

The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Army, the Department of Defense, or any other agency of the US government.
Motivation gives a cause for the driving force behind human behavior. Although many theories exist for motivation, this discussion will concentrate on the original motivation theory as discussed by Abraham H. Maslow in his 1943 article in *Psychological Review* entitled “A Theory of Human Motivation.”

In its simplest form, Maslow argues that motivation is governed by an ordered hierarchy of needs. One need must be satisfied before someone can progress into the next level. The degree of satisfaction for each level is not absolute and the necessary degree to which this satisfaction must apply for progress into the next level is beyond our discussion here. For the purpose of this application, it will be sufficient for us to discuss motivational needs in overall general terms. The hierarchy of needs is commonly considered to be:

1. **Physiological needs**

   Includes the needs of an organism for basic survival; such things as air, food, water, shelter.

2. **Safety needs**

   - Maslow states: “our society generally prefers a safe, orderly, predictable, organized world, which he can count on, and in which unexpected, unmanageable or other dangerous things do not happen....”
   - These include protection from criminal victimization, a secure job with a financially stable income, relatively good health with reasonably adequate medical care available, and shelter from
the effects of natural disasters with an understanding that emergency, social, and support services are available.

3. **Social (love) needs**
   - Also known as a sense of affection and belonging.
   - Could be called the “friends and family program.”
   - Social aspects of family connections and close friendships. Also manifested in memberships in community based groups, social clubs, professional memberships, sports team, gangs, faith based institutions.

4. **Esteem needs**

   Maslow defines this as “desire for a stable, firmly based, (usually) high evaluation of themselves, for self-respect, or self-esteem, and for the esteem of others. By firmly based self-esteem, we mean that which is soundly based upon real capacity, achievement and respect from others. These needs may be classified into two subsidiary sets. These are, first, the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom. Secondly, we have what we may call the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), recognition, attention, importance or appreciation…. Satisfaction of the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence, worth, strength, capability and adequacy of being useful and necessary in the world.”
5. **Self-actualization needs**

Maslow further defines this as: “the desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.”

Terrorist actions are designed to influence victims beyond the physical casualties and immediate audience. They are directed to threaten the security of the population into subjugation under the political will of the terrorists. The proliferation of media availability over the years from the initial TV news, followed by the 24-hour news availability, to the average person’s internet based video productions, has given terrorists a worldwide platform standing by to spread their fear to an eager audience.

Terrorist actions include:

1. **Bombings**

Bombings are a common form of terrorist actions. They are a magnet
for the international media, making the projection of the violence far beyond those immediately affected. Bombings also serve to disrupt services and cause the government to enact restrictive procedures on the general population in the name of security. These security procedures serve to reinforce the general threat and sense of fear posed by the terrorist.

2. **Assassinations**

Assassinations are a means for terrorists, and I might add criminal enterprises, to discourage the average citizen and certain government officials from acting against the terrorists. The message is clear that unless you cooperate with them and do not act to thwart them, you or someone close to you will be killed.

3. **Kidnappings**

Kidnapping someone is a complex problem for the terrorist. They must affect the initial capture, extricate the victim, transport the victim, and secretly maintain the imprisoned victim. But it does have its utility. This gives them the opportunity to interrogate someone and gather information. It reinforces the long term effect and inability of the government to stop their terror. This also serves to keep the terrorist group on the forefront of the media. Whenever they want some publicity, they can just release another video of their captive’s statement to the media. When the victim no longer serves their purpose, they can kill them, either in the grisly decapitations we have seen recently in the Middle East and Mexican narco-terrorism wars or just leave the body like Aldo Moro.\(^2\)
4. Hijackings/Hostage-taking

These two events are long term events which play out over a longer period of time. This time may be as short as a few days, such as the three day Beslan Russian school crisis or may last for months as in the 126 day takeover of the Japanese Embassy in Lima, Peru, by communist terrorists in 1996/1997. These provide a theater for the terrorists to present their position, emasculate the Government and manipulate the media to spread their terror. Plenty of time is available for the media to entrench themselves and build the excitement toward a public and violent climax initiated by the terrorists.

5. General criminal activities

Terrorists are criminals. There are laws against bombing, murder, kidnapping, etc. If terrorists are willing to ignore all these laws, terrorists are willing to violate any law. They operate outside the law constantly justifying their actions by a political righteousness. They will establish various criminal enterprises to finance their actions. These will include extortion, bank robbery, and illicit drug trade.

These actions serve to attack some of the general population’s basic motivational needs. Beyond the obvious physiological needs of the immediate victims, terrorist actions threaten the motivational needs of the general audience beyond these immediate victims.

We can certainly dissect all terrorist incidents to identify how each attack the five basic motivational needs, but the examples identified above are adequate to provide the reader with the general thrust of these attacks on three of the basic needs. The attack on the physiological need by terrorist actions is obvious and will not be addressed here. The need for self-
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actualization is beyond the scope of this discussion. So the discussion will concentrate on the three central motivational needs as defined by Maslow.

Terrorism threatens the following:

1. **Maslow’s second need – Safety**

   Maslow uses children as an example to discuss the deprivation of security: “injustice, unfairness, or inconsistency…threatens to make the world look unreliable, or unsafe, or unpredictable.” Confronted “with new, unfamiliar, strange, unmanageable stimuli or situations will too frequently elicit the danger or terror reaction….”

   - Attacking the security need is the fundamental goal of terrorists. By attacking this level the terrorists make your world inconsistent and threaten your security. They project the attack against the immediate victims to the viewing populace through the eyes of the media.

   - It is important to note that the direct victims are, in general, irrelevant to the terrorist. The terrorists do not care if you are a direct victim of the violence; they want to project that sense of terror upon you that you may become a victim at some uncertain time. This will manifest itself as a constant state of fear in the general population.

2. **Maslow’s third need – Social**

   Maslow defines the loss of this need as: “In our society the thwarting of these needs [social] is the most commonly found core in cases of maladjustment and more severe psychopathology.”
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- John M. Barry talks about the city of Philadelphia during the 1918 Influenza outbreak in his book *The Great Influenza*. “Fear began to break down the community of the city. Trust broke down. Signs began to surface of not just edginess but anger, not just finger-pointing or protecting one’s own interests but active selfishness in the face of general calamity.”3 “It is the quality of coherence that holds a nation together.”4

- We know from studies of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder that victims of terrorism can experience intense fear causing them to become isolated, have angry outbursts and thoughts of hurting themselves and others. They have a sense of helplessness becoming isolated with feelings of detachment creating estrangement from the community.5

3. *Maslow’s fourth need - Esteem*

Maslow states: “thwarting of these needs [self-esteem] produces feelings of inferiority, of weakness and of helplessness. These feelings in turn give rise to either basic discouragement or else compensatory or neurotic trends.”

- C. J. Chivers reported in *Esquire Magazine*: “On September 2, 2004, negotiations between Roshal and the [Beslan school] hostage-takers proved unsuccessful, and they refused to allow food, water, and medicines to be taken in for the hostages or for the bodies of the dead to be removed from the front of the school.”6 By targeting the basic needs of the children, the terrorists also emphasize the feelings of the inadequacy of parents to provide for their child’s basic needs.
TIME reported that on September 5, 2004, in a televised speech on the Beslan Hostage crisis, Russian President Putin paraphrased Joseph Stalin saying: “We have shown weakness. The weak ones get beaten.”7 Again using the mass media to project this weakness worldwide, far beyond the immediate audience in Beslan.

Application of the Maslow Theory for a counterterrorism strategy:

In Heroic Leadership, Chris Lowery states “Leaders duties [include] motivating and inspiring [and] energizing people to overcome major political, bureaucratic, and resource barriers to change by satisfying basic, but often unfulfilled, human needs.”8 It is the leader’s responsibility to transform the actions of the terrorists into a positive counterterrorism strategy based on fulfilling and satisfying the basic needs of the general populations rather than allowing the terrorists to strip these needs away by establishing barriers to fulfilling these needs through the application of fear tactics.

What actions can be taken before terrorists strike, and what can be accomplished immediately after and followed up by a government to mitigate a terrorist event in the context of the Maslow defined security, safety and esteem needs?

There are actions that officials can take to mitigate the terrorist strikes and possibly turn their attacks into positive support for the government. Some of these actions include:

- Continuity of services
- Timely, truthful and accurate communications
• Civilian defense force

**Continuity of Services**

The efforts of the terrorist to disrupt the daily life of the general population must be minimized. In *The Great Influenza*, John Barry states: “It is the quality of coherence that holds a nation together.” Hurricane Katrina showed us how a total breakdown of services can destroy the very fabric of orderly society. Without services and a sense of security, self-centered attitudes overtook order. Society degenerated into anarchy. But people gain a sense of confidence if they can see and experience the cohesion of the government’s actions. We can see in *The 9/11 Commission Report* that “Many civilians [coming down the fire escapes of the towers] were in awe of the firefighters [climbing the stairwells] and found their mere presence to be calming.” The Department of Defense and the US Government were open for business on 9/12. The mail was delivered. Offices across the country were open.

In *The Effects of a Threatening Rumor on a Disaster Stricken Community*, it is reported that “where the threat is ambiguous confused and harried thinking is likely to lead to inappropriate decisions for action.” “We have some evidence for the fact that the activities of a well informed population under threat may be predictable.” “We would conclude that it is highly important to provide (1) an educational program designed to acquaint the public with the nature of potential disaster and requisite actions for survival, and (2) prompt redactions of ambiguity concerning the range of destruction while the disaster is in progress. Without these the reactions of the population will be unpredictable and possibility inappropriate.”
Governments must do everything in their power to minimize the effect of a terrorist incident on the general population. They must provide a sense of cohesion for the general population. Daily services such as utilities, schools, markets, transportation, mail, emergency services, television, newspapers and others that people are accustomed to, must be continued or restored as soon as possible. Interruption of these daily services can have deep, immediate and long lasting effects of fear instilled in the population by the terrorists.

Although the results of a terrorist incident can be seen quite clearly by the resulting physical destruction, officials need to limit this by confining these effects to the immediate area of damage. These areas should be cordoned off, and the physical effects of this damage should not be allowed to affect the daily lives of the population outside the immediate area.
Effect of Continuity of Services on Maslow's central hierarchy of needs:

1. *Safety*

Continuity of services will increase the feeling of safety and security. The ability to go about one's daily life as though little has happened to disrupt it provides confidence in the ability of officials to deal with the crisis, instills a degree of trust in the government, calms fears and mitigates the effects of the terrorist incidents. One can expect consistent and predictable daily existence. People can depend on a safe and secure existence. This mitigates the projection of the fear or terror reaction beyond the immediate victims into the general population.

2. *Social*

The more governments can provide a sense of normalcy and security, the greater will be the confidence of the people in that government. People feel a part of the greater social environment, maintain trusting relationships and become interested in the greater good. More anger will be directed against the terrorists and less against the government. Destructive groups such as vigilante groups, mobs and gangs will be less likely to develop. Looting and civil strife will be less likely to develop. Constructive groups such as religious and non-governmental organizations are more likely to be trusted. People will be more likely to follow government direction, enhancing the ability of the government to respond to the crisis. Rational logic will overcome irrational behavior.

The more governments can provide a sense of normalcy and security, the greater will be the confidence of the people in that government.
This has also been detailed by Daya Somasundram in “Collective trauma in northern Sri Lanka: a qualitative psychosocial-ecological study.”

3. Esteem

Confidence in the government diminishes the population’s feelings of exposure and vulnerability to events beyond their control, giving them a sense of their value to government officials that they will not be abandoned by the government. This will all serve to raise their self-esteem and sense of worth. This will also establish a sense of mutual appreciation between the government and the people. Encouragement from the visible operating government services dampens the sense of fear developing into terror.

Timely, Accurate and Truthful Communications

The most imperative response by any official to a terrorist incident or any other disaster is timely, accurate and truthful communications. Various examples exist which discuss the effects of poor communications in a crisis:

From *The Great Influenza* about the worldwide 1918 Influenza outbreak:

- “The federal government was giving no guidance that a reasoning person could credit. Few local governments did any better. They left a vacuum and fear filled it.”

- “As terrifying as the disease was, the press made it more so. They terrified by making little of it, for what officials and the press said
bore no relationship to what people saw and touched and smelled and endured.”

- “Fear, that was the enemy. Yes, fear. And the more officials tried to control it with half-truths and outright lies, the more the terror spread.”

The 9/11 Commission Report details:

- “During the course of the morning, there were multiple erroneous reports of hijacked aircraft.”

- “[I]nvolve [the emergency response team] in providing up-to-date information and assistance to the public.”

- Even today conspiracy theories which have been refuted by respected technical experts continue to circulate about the collapse of the two World Trade Center buildings.

The "Report on Russian media coverage of the Beslan tragedy: Access to information and journalists' working conditions" by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) states:

Street car conductor in Seattle not allowing passenger aboard without mask for fear of spreading Influenza, 1918 Photo: National Archives
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- “According to the poll by Ekho Moskvy radio station, 92% of the people polled said that Russian TV channels concealed parts of information.”

- “The government disinformation also sparked the incidents of violence by the local residents, aware of the real numbers, against the members of Russian and foreign media.”

Marco Antônio Sperb Leite and L. David Roper state in their 1988, “The Goiânia Radiation Incident, A Failure of Science and Society” on the radiation exposure of the general population from an abandoned medical facility in South America:

- “The official information was contradictory, and showed a large lack of technical knowledge about how to control the situation. The government of the state of Goiás used all means of communication to avert panic. Because of the lack of confidence of the citizens in governments, which they believed consistently did not tell them the truth, rumors were rampant.”

- “Various persons accused the news media of exaggerating the problem and thereby increasing the panic, we think that the communication problem was not so much exaggeration by the press, but was largely due to lack of timely, adequate, organized and accurate information supplied by CNEN to the press. Instead of one authoritative spokesman there were many contradictory spokesmen; thus the press had to decide which one was correct.”

It can be seen from these examples that the delivery of timely, accurate and truthful information is an elusive target. Rumors are always available to fill in when information is lacking. Even when the information is
Some things that can be done to change the spread of rumors include:

- All communication must be accurate. US Navy training doctrine reflects that sight accounts for 75% of what people learn. If the information they receive from official sources through the media is in conflict with what they see, not only will they begin to question the information, it will be difficult to overcome the rumors with forthright reports, and the media releases will be discounted. Establishment of a communications and media center for dissemination of information will greatly enhance communications. This center can also receive rumors from the field which can be identified and addressed by the appropriate officials.

- Information must be passed to the local officials as it is disseminated to the general population. There must not be a conflict between the information put out by different levels of the government.

Communications can be disseminated through trusted sources. These include religious organizations, medical facilities, community service organizations and certain relief organizations (such as the Red Cross/Red Crescent), which all have an established trusting relationship with the population. Maintain relationships with key members of the community (Church, relief agencies, medical facilities). These are normally trusted by
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the community. If these groups rely and believe an official’s statements, the general populace will tend to also lend credibility to these releases.

- These institutions also attract people looking for comfort during a crisis.

- Rumors must be continuously identified and addressed. Officials should identify rumors as unconfirmed reports which are being investigated. Once identified as false, they should be disseminated as investigated rumors which have been proven to be inaccurate or false. Consider the rumor network as a feedback mechanism to understand the breath and depth of the effects of the crisis.

- Constantly listen to people’s concerns and act on them. This will serve to quell rumors and let people know officials are on working in the best interest of the general population.

- Routinely, communications should include information on sources of assistance for people in need; what types of assistance are available, where to get it and how to get to temporary shelters, medical facilities and centers for reuniting of displaced persons.

- Identify and update safe areas/hazard areas. This will allow people to decide if they should evacuate and where to go or if it is safe for them to stay where they are.

After an incident, after-action reports followed by open hearings need to address popular issues. The chief investigator and the chairman of the hearings should be individuals who are trusted by the populace. Media access, although controlled, should be provided to the maximum extent possible. Trusted civic and community leaders, with a direct interest in a
fair and unbiased outcome, should be sought to populate these investiga-
tive and hearing boards.

Effect of *Timely, Accurate and Truthful Communications* on Maslow’s central hierarchy of needs:

1. **Safety**

   Timely, accurate and truthful communications provide a path for people to create order from the initial disorganization of a crisis. By dispelling rumors people gain confidence in the information received through official channels. Armed with an accurate understanding of the situation, they can now make rational decisions to manage their own expectation of safety from victimization. The unknown will dissipate and give way to reliable predictability. People will then be able to gravitate toward a gradual state of calm and dissolve the fear that spawns terror.

2. **Social**

   Reliable communication brings with it a level of trust. Using originally trusted sources to spread the communications reinforces the population’s trust in these community based organizations. This trust can coalesce across family and small groups to further bolster the sense of community. It is this mutual confidence which is more likely to quell anger and less likely to assess blame. Individual members of the community will begin to act in a rational manner for the common good. People will also be more inclined to accept official direction and
limit their desire to form rogue groups with their own sense of authority.

3. *Esteem*

The satisfaction instilled by timely, accurate and truthful communications increases the self-confidence of the general population. People tend to feel more in control of their destiny, giving them strength to face the day with the overall belief that they will either not be affected or minimally affected by the crisis. This encourages people to dispel the terror generated by fear.

**Civilian Response Force**

Many people want to volunteer their services. They identify with the physical victims and feel the need to “do something” to help. Volunteers receive a sense of belonging and ownership of the problem. They make the people and the government mutual stakeholders.

Governments must capitalize on these feelings.

- The immediate response after a terrorist attack requires a number of actions which do not necessarily require the attention of government officials. Some of these include running blood drives for the victims, manning telephones to receive inquiries, administrative services at medical facilities and operation of heavy equipment. There is no need to tie up valuable resources demanded for other emergency services when volunteers can be easily organized, with minimal supervision, to provide a positive contribution to the overall response.
Volunteer corps can be established prior to an incident for mobilization on short notice. This cadre of personnel can be trained and mobilized for any number of disaster incidents, be they man-made (terrorism), natural (earthquake, hurricane) or accidental (airliner crash). These corps can often be organized and trained for minimal costs. Most people volunteer and receive no fee for their services. Some of the training can be accomplished through Non-Government Organizations for no or minimal costs.

The 9/11 Commission Report accurately states: “The ‘first’ first responders on 9/11, as in most catastrophes, were private sector citizens.” These citizens are suddenly and immediately faced with the horrors of the initial attack. Training in first aid will not only prepare these “first” responders for the initial horrors but, more importantly, give them the knowledge to provide an immediate response before emergency services arrive on the scene.

At the Beslan, Russia school hostage terrorist incident “Few ambulances were available to transport the hundreds of injured victims, who were driven in private cars,” and “One suspected terrorist was lynched on the scene by a mob of civilians…” A Civilian Defense Force can organize the people to supplement government services, such as drivers for the less severely injured or manning security for an outer perimeter, and make development of vigilante groups less likely.

However, during the 1918 influenza outbreak, John Barry reports in The Great Influenza that “Many of those who had earlier rushed forward to volunteer had withdrawn. The work was too gruesome or too arduous...or they were too frightened.” So every step
must be taken to keep distance between these volunteers and the most horrifying tasks.

- After an incident to reinforce this sense of mutual stakeholders, volunteers and emergency service workers should be rewarded in a public forum for their service.

**Effect of a Civil Defense Force on Maslow’s central hierarchy of needs:**

1. **Safety**

A civil defense force allows the population to take direct action to preserve their own security in the event of a crisis. It provides an immediate sense of organization in fluid situations, giving a mood of predictability and safety. People are trained to react to the unexpected
in an orderly and consistent manner offering a sense of security which structure provides. People can manage their fears, thereby reducing their feelings of terror.

2. **Social**

Members of a civil defense force reinforce their social attachments by becoming members of this community based organization. This extends beyond their direct involvement into their family. These memberships reinforce trust in the government with people more apt to believe the government through this civil defense force that is working for them. It also brings a sense of shared involvement into the relief efforts. People are less likely to indulge in finger-pointing and inclined to mitigate anger. People are more likely to reject the fear which generates terror.

3. **Esteem**

Direct involvement bolsters the self-esteem of the members of the civil defense force. They project respect for their community far above that which can be generated from the official response. The presence of members of the community gives a higher level of confidence in the crisis response. People develop overall strength and encouragement from the visible sight of the courage of their neighbors who are organized and responding in the face of uncertainty. The members of the civil defense force earn for themselves the feeling of importance and self-respect. They overcome weakness and helplessness, depriving the terrorist of their imposition of fear.

In summary, there are a number of positive actions a government can accomplish to dissipate the fear of becoming an arbitrary victim that terror-
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Terrorists, through their use of violence, inflict on the general population. These actions are not designed to replace counterinsurgency or counterterrorism activities of the military and police. They are not designed to replace the emergency services response. Rather, they are meant to complement the application of force and emergency services that respond to crisis situations. These actions can be accomplished with minimal effort and at minimal cost. They also apply directly to mitigating the purpose of the terrorist actions.

Strategic leadership needs to review policies to ensure these actions are not discouraged. Then implement policies and provide resources that encourage the local leaders to apply these measures. Leaders at the local levels can begin to identify requirements, assign responsibilities and organize the local populations. These recommendations need to be incorporated into the national and local crisis response plans. They then need to be practiced and refined through a series of drills and exercises. The probable benefits that can be gained from these relatively simple actions far outweigh, by orders of magnitude, the alternative.

NOTES


2 Aldo Moro was the well liked former Prime Minister of Italy who was kidnapped by the Italian Terrorist Group, The Red Brigade, on March 16, 1978 and found murdered in a car on May 9, 1978.


4 Ibid., 207.

5 Subcommittee on Posttraumatic Stress disorder of the Committee on Gulf War and Health, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder: Diagnosis and Assessment (Washington, DC: The National


Ibid.


Ibid., 335.

Ibid., 336.


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