

A Forum for Interagency Collaboration:

The National Counterterrorism Center and the Joint Counterterrorism Awareness Workshop Series

by Greg Keeney

On December 6, 2011, the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) celebrated its seventh year as the primary United States government organization for integrating and analyzing terrorist-related intelligence. The center was established in 2004 by Presidential Executive Order 13354 and codified by Congress in the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act that effectively amended the United States National Security Act of 1947. The establishment of the NCTC was a watershed moment in America's history, as it was charged with the mission to bridge the gap between America's international and domestic counterterrorism capabilities. It was the first step in the U.S. government's effort to consolidate its counterterrorism resources into a joint operational planning and joint intelligence enterprise that incorporates the capacities of 16 departments and agencies. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, proved the nation required a comprehensive, holistic approach to safeguard the homeland and protect American citizens. NCTC was established in response to this need.

Over the past decade, NCTC's capabilities, along with those of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), have matured. Although, the Director of NCTC does not have the authority to direct or execute counterterrorism missions, he reports both to the President of the United States and the Director of National Intelligence on issues related to counterterrorism intelligence and readiness. Through the National Security Staff, NCTC is accountable to the President on specific counterterrorism issues that relate to planning, policy, strategy, and preparedness. NCTC is also responsible for reporting to the Director of National Intelligence on intelligence and information-sharing agreements that influence counterterrorism planning, policy, strategy, and preparedness internationally and domestically. The scope of responsibility of the Director of NCTC is vast, but it is an important aspect of the nation's counterterrorism architecture if the nation is to move forward

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in its ability to thwart, respond to, and recover from terrorist attacks against interests at home and overseas.

One specific program, the Joint Counterterrorism Awareness Workshop Series (JCTAWS), is a component of the nation's counterterrorism apparatus that addresses national preparedness, as well as intelligence and information-sharing aspects of the NCTC mission. The program was introduced in 2010 during a conference in Monterey, CA, and is

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organized in collaboration with the DHS and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) as a means for state, local, and city officials and private sector entities to identify gaps in their response capabilities to a complex, multi-incident, domestic terrorist attack within their jurisdictions. The workshop is a one-day tabletop exercise that allows them to address regional preparedness to respond to a domestic terrorist attack.

At the core of the workshop is an attack scenario that is developed for a particular city within the U.S. The scenario is geographically focused using the particular tactics and techniques employed by terrorist organizations (open-source documents, Internet, and other means to obtain information about a specific target of interest). Workshop participants are provided with a set of tools and the scenario in advance to allow each federal, regional, state, and local entity sufficient time to digest the situation and provide insightful comments

during the workshop. The realistic scenario is researched and validated by an NCTC team of planners. Providing the scenario and supporting matrices to the workshop participants helps level the playing field for all participants. These realistic sets of circumstances enhance the participants' ability to identify capabilities gaps within their respective jurisdictions.

The workshop series and its scenario are based on the November 26, 2008, Mumbai, India, terrorist attacks, during which members of Lashkar-e-Taiba conducted near simultaneous attacks that led to 174 killed and multiple people injured. The attacks specifically targeted Mumbai's Taj Mahal and Oberoi hotels, the Cama hospital, the Nariman House business and residential building that contained a Jewish outreach center, a railway station, and a local café. During the attacks, ten terrorists were successful in keeping security forces at a distance for more than three days; nine were eventually killed and one taken prisoner. The attacks began within minutes of each other and quickly overwhelmed local law enforcement, fire and rescue, emergency medical, and public transportation systems that were not adequately equipped to deal with a catastrophe of this magnitude. The event was eye-opening for the international community, because a terrorist attack of this magnitude had not occurred since 9/11 when the terrorists employed only one method of attack—commercial aircraft. Mumbai demonstrated a terrorist organization's capacity and will to conduct multiple attacks over a short period of time by employing numerous tactics. Although a Mumbai-style attack is the foundation of the JCTAWS scenario, the NCTC scenario developers take into account past, current, and recently-developed terrorist tactics and techniques and incorporate them into their scenarios when appropriate.

During 2011, JCTAWS working group members from NCTC, DHS/Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the FBI, commonly

referred to as an interagency planning group (IPG), conducted six workshops. Five more workshops are planned for 2012, and more are projected in 2013. It is during these workshops that state, local, and city entities and private sector participants identify regional capabilities, self-identify their capability gaps, and discuss emergency response planning as it pertains to administration, intelligence, information, operations, logistics, training, communication, equipment, emergency services, and authorities related to a complex, multi-incident, domestic terrorist attack in their respective jurisdictions.

Initially, the IPG conducts a planning meeting with the prospective city and performs an area assessment of potential targets, which it incorporates into the framework of the workshop's scenario. All related research is conducted physically in the city or through the use of open source methods and Internet—the technique utilized by Lashkar-e-Taiba prior to the Mumbai attacks. Then the IPG works closely with the host city to provide invitations, set up a registration site, and develop a specific, geographic scenario and relevant federal, regional, state, and local response matrixes for use during the workshop itself. During the workshop, an initial plenary session is conducted to walk through the events, followed by break-out sessions that talk through specific actions related to operational response, senior command, and community coordination.

An important and unique aspect of the workshop series is that NCTC follows up after the event and provides the city with a summary report. This report provides a quick reference of the workshop scenario, the detailed response matrices, capabilities gaps, and other points of interests. These documents are presented to the city during a post-workshop meeting with city law enforcement officials. NCTC and other members of the IPG continue to engage with the city leadership after the workshop to assist in its efforts to address capability gaps, share best

practices, and check on the status of progress over time. The JCTAWS host cities continue to engage with the IPG and other agencies throughout the process and beyond their participation in the workshop. The JCTAWS program is a continual process that hopes to expand its efforts to assist cities with developing their unified response plans and implementing resources to mitigate their capabilities gaps.

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The participants in a JCTAWS workshop represent a vast spectrum of government and public sector entities to include government officials, law enforcement, fire and rescue, emergency medical, emergency management, public works, public health, mental health, and Department of Defense (DoD), as well as private sector entities to include telecommunications, tourism, commercial industry, commerce, transportation, railways, maritime, and other geographically-focused commercial entities. The level of participation is representative of a whole-of-government approach many communities have established within their existing emergency response plans and emergency response institutions.

Typically, the complexity of the exercise scenario challenges even the most well-rehearsed, comprehensive, response plan, which can potentially be overwhelmed even with the most robust, emergency response, preparedness architecture. The objective of the workshop is to discover, in a collaborative environment, capability gaps and apply best practices and

available resources to mitigate a complex, multi-incident, terrorist attack. To this end, the workshop enables a community to better prepare itself to respond more effectively through understanding, insight, and specific knowledge of their particular geographical operational environments and available resources.

NCTC in collaboration with other U.S. government interagency partners has exported a complementary JCTAWS effort internationally. Using the framework of the domestic JCTAWS workshop scenarios, the international JCTAWS program provides the host nation a scenario based on its strategic objectives and geographically-focused on the host nation's national, provincial, local, and city infrastructure. The focus of the international program is to build communal understanding, develop international partnerships, mentor a capabilities assessment process, and provide lessons learned from America's perspective

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for the host nation. NCTC's insights into the lessons learned, best practices, and challenges to America's domestic counterterrorism response essentially enhance the workshop experience for the host nation..

NCTC's international JCTAWS outreach program is an important component of the U.S.'s counterterrorism strategy to build international counterterrorism partner relationships and greater international security cooperation to defeat terrorism. The international JCTAWS program is a multinational approach to

countering terrorism in the international community and expands upon America's efforts to build counterterrorism partner capacity and international cooperation. The challenges to thwart and respond to terrorist attacks are not specific to the U.S. The U.S. can also learn from its international counterterrorism partners.

The domestic JCTAWS program is an effective forum to build an environment of collective understanding across the spectrum of city, local, state, regional, and federal entities as well as with important private sector entities. Internationally, these workshops forge bonds and strengthen relationships between the U.S. and its counterterrorism allies around the world. The formal structure established by laws, policy, strategy, and authorities are supplemented by informal relationships built prior to a domestic emergency response effort. It is important to build these partnerships, both internationally and domestically, before a crisis occurs.

America maintains a high level of preparedness, response, and resiliency through strong partnerships across the U.S. government with cooperation from private sector entities. The DoD, as an example, has a tremendous counterterrorism capability, not to mention a depth of other resources that assist in domestic disaster relief and civil response efforts and facilitate international diplomacy and partnering. Domestically, strong partnerships with DoD at the state, local, and city levels, as well as within the private sector are important to America's national preparedness, response, and resiliency. It is important for city, local, and state entities to understand DoD's capabilities and how to request assistance from National Guard, reserve, and active components to respond to a domestic terrorist incident. An understanding of United States Code Title 10 (United States Armed Forces) and Title 32 (National Guard) authorities are important for emergency managers and planners at all levels to grasp the processes and authorities involved

in a response. Internationally, DoD continues to train host-nation military and security forces, specifically aligned with the Department of State regional and country objectives and synchronized with America's national security interests. Furthermore, the use of America's military capacity to support United States Code Title 50 (War and National Defense) operations overseas is enhanced by these types of outreach programs that build relationships and increase understanding and open communication with state leaders within the international community. The JCTAWS program provides an environment that greatly enhances international understanding of America's counterterrorism components and advocates security cooperation in its domestic and international, strategic approach to defeat terrorism.

The role of the DHS, a partner in the JCTAWS IPG, in managing domestic response to domestic incidents is defined in Homeland Security Presidential Directive-5. The DHS was established, in the same manner as NCTC, to protect America from terrorism through its multiple departments and agencies. DHS's efforts are focused on protecting infrastructure, cyberspace, and communication networks, and public and commercial transportation systems and building partnerships with state and local law enforcement to mitigate the threat of domestic terrorism. Its vast scope include areas such as aviation; chemical and nuclear; identification security, fraud, and counterfeiting; information sharing; protecting critical infrastructure; and law enforcement. It is important for state, local, and city entities to understand the DHS's capacity to thwart when possible and respond when needed to a complex, multi-incident, domestic terrorist attack, as well as the resources DHS can bring to assist during the recovery phase.

It is important for JCTAWS participants to understand the workings of the DHS Office of Operations Coordination and Planning,

which is responsible for monitoring security for the U.S. This office connects government officials at the state, local, and city levels through coordination with state governors, homeland security advisors, law enforcement, and critical infrastructure operators across all 50 states and within major metropolitan areas through the local emergency response centers and fusion centers. During a domestic, complex, multi-incident act of terrorism, people within the national response network have the ability to communicate across the spectrum of government to monitor, inform, advise, and assist counterterrorism response efforts conducted by city, local, and state entities. The management of the city, local, and state response is emphasized as much as the tactical response, which makes DHS's role in the IPG vital to the JCTAWS program and enhances the whole-of-government counterterrorism approach.

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In addition to DoD and DHS, the FBI, as the lead domestic terrorism agency, has specific domestic counterterrorism capabilities, such as the Hostage Rescue Team, the Crisis Negotiations Unit, and the Terrorist Explosive Device Analytical Center in Quantico, VA, that can assist state, city, and local entities with additional federal capacity. By law, the FBI has specific capabilities and authorities to conduct counterterrorism operations within the U.S. The FBI's Hostage Rescue Team provides a non-DoD, full-time, counterterrorist tactical team

that is trained, equipped, and resourced to operate within the U.S. The FBI's Crisis Negotiations Unit deploys domestically with the Hostage Rescue Team to manage negotiation assets at the scene of major sieges, crises, and critical incidents. The Terrorist Explosive Device Analytical Center capability, although not specifically a participant in the JCTAWS workshops, provides scientific and technical exploitation of improvised explosive devices, an important component to the investigation and prosecution aspects of a terrorist attack. The counterterrorism capacity of the FBI brings into play experienced professionals to respond and investigate acts of domestic terrorism.

The FBI counterterrorism capabilities are well suited to augment state, local, and city law enforcement and fire and rescue resources to deal with a domestic terrorism incident. More importantly, the FBI helps to leverage federal resources specifically developed for the sole purpose of counterterrorism operations. Since the FBI is the lead federal agency responsible for responding to domestic acts of terrorism, local and state authorities need to understand and integrate the FBI's counterterrorism response capabilities. As the nation's premier domestic counterterrorism agency, the FBI's participation in the JCTAWS program ensures that its capabilities are better understood by city, local, and state entities as a means to enhance the response to a domestic terrorist attack. This fact gives credence to a fully integrated, whole-of-government, interagency response for the U.S. to respond effectively to a complex, multi-incident, domestic terrorist attack in an American city.

In summary, NCTC's JCTAWS program is a forum that informs the Director of NCTC, policy makers, and government officials on the nation's preparedness to respond to a complex, multi-incident, domestic terrorist attack. More importantly, the JCTAWS workshops provide an environment for federal, regional, state, city, and local entities to collaborate and communicate on the ends, ways, and means available to respond to a domestic terrorist incident in a unified manner. Internationally, the JCAWS workshops are a small component of U.S. international security cooperation efforts. The workshops create a forum for direct dialogue with counterterrorism partners and minimize perceptions that the U.S. has all the answers and resources to combat terrorism in a unilateral manner.

Understanding the complexity of a multi-incident, domestic terrorist attack is one component of the JCTAWS program. More importantly, however, is America's need to continue to prepare and reinforce its emergency response planning for such an incident through training and allocating resources in order to be prepared, responsive, and resilient. NCTC's JCTAWS program provides a forum, domestically and internationally, to address counterterrorism preparedness. It is truly an interagency program that employs the whole-of-government and multinational approaches to better enable the U.S. and its international counterterrorism partners to strategically defeat terrorism in the future. Responding to terrorism effectively takes people, communications, relationships, willingness, and understanding—not to mention resources, security cooperation, and institutions designed to meet the demands of counterterrorism. **IAJ**