

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Many terrorism experts agree that the major objective of terrorist operations is to create an atmosphere of extreme fear and paralysis among the public. The public will then pressure the government to make policy changes in order to avoid future terrorist attacks, a result that terrorists may not be able to achieve on their own. Efforts that educate the public on terrorism and initiatives that strengthen the physical and psychological resilience of citizens may deprive terrorists of this potential weapon. Effective engagement and mobilization of the public in support of counterterrorism policies is critical for the success of counterterrorism efforts in two respects: first, proper education and awareness on the terrorist threat prepares the public for a terror-related disaster, rendering citizens able and willing partners in responding to the respective crises; second, a resilient public can resist the psychological and other potential disabling impact of a terrorist attack on a society, which deprives terrorists of an important weapon.

The Risk Sciences Branch, Special Programs Division of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Science and Technology (S&T) Directorate is interested in understanding the underlying reasons that are associated with successful and unsuccessful terrorist attacks, and particularly identifying those factors that can be leveraged to counter terrorist organizations. Through two previous studies, the Homeland Security Institute (HSI) has assisted the S&T Directorate in that endeavor. This study constitutes the third phase of this effort. HSI was tasked with examining Israel as a case study of successful counterterrorism practices in order to identify why Israeli security forces seem to be so successful in thwarting terrorist attacks, both before and during execution.

Counterterrorism efforts in Israel, defined here as "operations that include the *offensive* measures taken to prevent, deter, preempt, and respond to terrorism [emphasis added]," were reviewed to gain better understanding of the Israeli approach, its components and guiding principles. Our initial research suggested that strong public resilience and engagement in counterterrorism efforts are key factors contributing to the success of Israeli counterterrorism practices. Although Israeli success in motivating public mobilization in support of counterterrorism efforts is widely acknowledged by many practitioners of homeland security/counterterrorism, the methods by which Israeli authorities achieve such high levels of public engagement are not readily understood or discussed. Therefore, our subsequent research has focused on the significance and role of the public in counterterrorism practices.

This study examines the Israeli approach to public engagement in counterterrorism efforts and points to some of the practices which have been successfully used by Israel to foster and leverage a resilient and capable public to deter and defeat terrorist attacks. These practices may be useful in providing guidance for enhancement of counterterrorism efforts by the United States. It is important to note, however, that Israel and the United States are fundamentally different societies having different traditions and facing different threat levels. This may impact the applicability of specific Israeli practices to the U.S. socio-cultural, political and legal landscape. Our process for assessing applicability focused on identifying high level, practical recommendations. A more rigorous methodological approach was beyond the scope of this effort.

## **Objectives**

The success or failure of terrorist attacks depends on a complex and nonlinear interplay of different factors. Counterterrorism policies and their effectiveness in deterring such attacks are only one of the possible factors contributing to this equation. A complete assessment of all the factors that impact the success of counterterrorism efforts is beyond the scope of any single study. Based on our initial investigation, this study focused, instead, on an identified key factor in effective counterterrorism practices—the role and significance of public participation. Accordingly, the objectives of this study included the following:

- Identify the successful Israeli practices in public participation in counterterrorism policies.
- Explore the specific ways and means through which Israeli authorities facilitate and motivate the public for effective engagement in counterterrorism policies.
- Determine some of the inherent differences between the two countries that may impact applicability of the Israeli practices to the U.S. operational context.
- Assess what types of activities DHS and other government agencies and stakeholders of homeland security could take to inspire and facilitate greater public participation in counterterrorism efforts in the United States.

## **Key Findings**

The key findings of this study are as follows:

- The initial literature review revealed that the public plays a significant role in the success of Israeli counterterrorism efforts. The level of public understanding of the terrorist threat and readiness for terror-induced emergencies is such that Israeli public has an impressive ability to bounce back from frequent terrorist attacks. Israeli government pursues a comprehensive and diverse program to bolster a strong public resilience and utilizes it as a deliberate counterterrorism tool.
- The Israeli government appears to pursue a fourfold strategy to inspire effective public participation in counterterrorism efforts. First, a comprehensive and extensive public education and awareness program on terrorism ensures public understanding of the threat, its serious consequences, and the need for readiness and response skills. Second, the public is educated on how to handle and report suspicious activity, persons, and vehicles. Third, the public is treated as the true first responders and its ability to effectively handle emergencies is regularly tested through periodic training and drills. Fourth, the Israeli government's risk communications with the public on terrorism-related issues are balanced, precise and honest. They also reflect adequate differentiation in the messaging in accordance with the audience and intent.
- The primary source interviews in the United States and Israel highlighted some of the main differences in approach to the issue and at the same time pointed to areas for possible improvement in the United States.

Some of the specific key observations about the Israeli and U.S. approach to public role and engagement in counterterrorism are as follows:

***In Israel***

- The public is treated as a key partner in counterterrorism.
- Both the public and government agree on a high level of public responsibility for personal safety and national security.
- The public is interested and motivated to assume its responsibility in counterterrorism issues.
- The level of public participation in counterterrorism efforts and readiness programs for terrorism-related emergencies is high. This is likely to be the result of the high threat level and strong national consensus on public preparedness.
- The government programs and messaging are centralized, highly coordinated, and consistent.
- The government organizes and funds extensive, diverse, and ubiquitous programs that provide the public with appropriate information and education to facilitate its active role in counterterrorism.
- The Israeli government enjoys a high level of public trust and credibility on terrorism-related issues.

***In the United States***

- Within the official paradigm of homeland security, terrorism is subsumed under an “all-hazards” approach.
- Both the public and the government perceive counterterrorism primarily to be the responsibility of the government.
- In official emergency management and security/counterterrorism programs, the term “the public” appears to be frequently understood to mean only uniformed /official first responders. Thus, large parts of the public at large are excluded.
- The level of public participation in counterterrorism efforts and readiness programs for catastrophic incidents—both natural and manmade, including terrorism-related emergencies—is low.
- The current public apathy may be a result of the lack of effective/adequate programs for greater citizen involvement in counterterrorism practices.
- The number of and funding for effective programs for public education and training on terrorism-related issues is limited and reflects a lack of prioritization at the national level.
- Even though there are examples of good practices in the field at the state and local level, there is little awareness of these efforts at the federal level. Moreover, these efforts are disjointed, inconsistent, and lack federal-level coordination and mandate.

## **The Way Forward: Recommendations**

Taking into consideration the similarities and differences in the social and cultural dynamics, governance and legal systems as well as the threat environment of Israel and the United States, we carefully analyzed the above findings for practical recommendations that could inform and enhance the respective practices of the United States. As indicated previously, our intent is that the United States should learn from the effectiveness of Israeli practices and the methods used to achieve that effectiveness but should not indiscriminately copy them. In all cases, effective practices should be adapted to U.S. needs, fully cognizant of unique U.S. socio-cultural perspectives and political/legal constraints.

Some of our key recommendations include:

- DHS needs to champion greater understanding, in both the general public and within those responsible for homeland security, of the public's unique role in ensuring its own safety and homeland security. Emergency authorities, in particular, need to change their perceptions of the public from seeing them as victims to considering them as partners and force multipliers.
- As a way to reinforce this understanding, DHS needs to support programs that inform, educate, train, and prepare the public to take a role in ensuring its own safety and security.
- Despite its benefits, the current all-hazards approach has an unintended consequence—terrorism-specific preparedness issues are not adequately understood and addressed. There is need for more systematic and comprehensive terrorism awareness and education programs in the United States that can highlight terrorism-specific risks and coping strategies.
- Given the perception that the terrorist threat to the United States is non-immediate, the government will need to work creatively to overcome public apathy, and must increase preparedness for disasters in general and terrorism-related emergencies in particular.
- To mount an effective counterterrorism strategy, DHS and other federal agencies involved in homeland security issues need to improve information sharing internally and better coordinate their risk communications with the public.
- Providing the public, particularly the more youthful segments of the population, with terrorism-related information, education, and training may prove useful in facilitating and maintaining public resilience as a long-term counterterrorism strategy.

## INTRODUCTION

When a terrorist attack takes place, the broadcasted footage of the incident brings the images of fatalities and injuries as well as the grief of those directly affected into our living rooms. Viewers' biggest fear appears to be the possibility that the next time a terrorist attack targets a mass gathering place, they may be at one of those public sites—walking, sightseeing, or working. One thing ordinary citizens often miss is the fact that for terrorist organizations the *direct damage*, that is, loss of life, injury, and property damage, is the least ambitious of their objectives.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the strategic objective behind such militant acts is something that is much more complicated, and could ensure returns for a long time to come.

Actual loss of human life and injuries caused by terrorism amount to only a small share of death and injury caused by other factors such as traffic accidents, natural disasters, diseases, and wars.<sup>2</sup> The psychological impact of terrorist attacks, on the other hand, often outweighs the impact of material damage and bodily harm caused by such incidents.<sup>3</sup> The *indirect damage* of terrorism is “not under the control of terrorists; [rather] it is mediated through the minds of citizens.”<sup>4</sup> Random terror attacks on civilians, experts agree, may create a level of fear and anxiety that is grossly disproportionate to the actual risk posed by terrorism.<sup>5</sup>

According to Boaz Ganor, the director of the *International Institute for Counterterrorism* (ICT) in Israel, the cognitive amplification of the threat, in turn, can cause a diminished sense of security, poor morale, and reduced confidence in the ability of citizens to survive and take care of themselves and their families in the case of an actual attack. This sense of fear and helplessness is apparently substantiated as citizens begin questioning their government's capability to provide protection from terrorist attacks.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the

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<sup>1</sup> For concepts of direct and indirect damages, see Gerd Gigerenzer, “Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire: Behavioral Reactions to Terrorist Attacks,” *Risk Analysis*, vol. 26, no. 2 (2006), p. 347.

<sup>2</sup> According to Bruce Hoffman, a professor in the Security Studies program of Georgetown University and a well known terrorism expert, while traffic accidents kill 43,000 people per year, 17,000 per year are murdered. See Siobhan Gorman, “Fear Factor: Beyond a Panic Driven Approach to Homeland Security,” *National Journal*, May 16, 2003, <<http://www.govexec.com/dailyfed/0503/051603nj1.htm>>.

<sup>3</sup> Boaz Ganor, “Israel's Counterterrorism Policy: 1983-1999 Efficacy versus Liberal Democratic Values,” 2002, <<http://www.ict.org.il/Articles/tabid/66/Articlsid/85/currentpage/20/Default.aspx>>.

<sup>4</sup> Gigerenzer, p. 347.

<sup>5</sup> Boaz Ganor, “Terror as a Strategy of Psychological Warfare,” July 15, 2002, <<http://212.150.54.123/articles/articleDET.cfm?articleid=443>>.

<sup>6</sup> This issue was raised in an HSI's *Pilot Study: Psychological Impacts of a Terrorist Attack on a National Icon* (March 31, 2008). One possible psychological impact identified was a decrease in the public confidence for government after a terrorist attack. Even in cases where a large scale and dramatic attack leads to an initial “rally effect,” that is, a show of patriotic support for