



Vigilance Key in Combating Terrorism

“You can observe a lot just by watching.” That remark from one of the most quoted personalities in sports, Yogi Berra, is deceptively simple and a bit redundant. But it also reminds us how crucial vigilance is in combating terrorism.

In case after case of terrorist attacks — successful or not — eyewitnesses have reported observing, for example, an agitated transit passenger fiddling nervously with the contents of his backpack, a visitor to an event who appears excessively nervous, or a tourist who can’t answer a few simple questions coherently.

Other suspicious activities that have been caught on tape or digitally recorded have helped officials identify perpetrators and would-be terrorists. Whether on patrol or viewing CCTV monitors security personnel should be increasingly vigilant of unusual or out-of-place behavior in these perilous times.

Nonverbal Cues

What kinds of things can you watch for? Research into nonverbal communication and recent observations and findings of



the behavior and training of al-Qaeda operatives offer several important pointers.

Human beings often exhibit certain physical traits when nervous or under stress. (One can only imagine the stress, even assuming the belief in the cause is resolute, brought on by a desperate act of terrorism.)

Symptoms to watch for may include:

- Lack of eye contact
- Sweating
- Excessive hand movements
- Biting fingernails
- Chewing of the inside of the mouth
- Dry mouth

Vocal characteristics may also indicate that someone is hiding something. That’s what



finally tipped off customs inspector Diana Dean, who helped nab Ahmed Ressam at the Port Angeles, Washington ferry terminal in 1999. Ressam was traveling with highly volatile bomb components in an apparent plan to blow up a major U.S. target when Dean noticed that he appeared nervous and sweaty. In addition, when questioned, he hesitated and fumbled for words.

Odd Group Behavior

People who watch airports and other transportation centers are trained to notice unusual patterns in the movement of people. A group of people entering a facility together and then suddenly splitting apart and going separate ways may be considered suspicious.

In another example, two men walking side-by-side is not unusual but if they're observed walking purposefully in line, that may be a warning sign.

The FBI has issued some indicators that a person may be carrying an explosive device, intent on murder through suicide. Taken individually, these indicators may mean nothing unusual, but when several are present, a suspicious picture emerges:

- Wearing inappropriate attire such as loose or bulky clothing inconsistent with current weather conditions
- Protruding bulges or exposed wires under clothing
- Strange chemical odors
- Mumbling (as in prayers), or unusually calm or detached behavior
- Attempting to gain a position amid a crowd or near an important person



- Tightened hands as if gripping something
- Wearing disguises appropriate to the target area (military, police, fire fighter) or posing as a pregnant woman

How to Respond

It is also important to realize that not all people who appear nervous, sweaty, wear bulky clothes, have trouble with words or exhibit any of the characteristics mentioned here are troublemakers or terrorists.

But citizens and security personnel should report suspicious persons and activity to proper authorities immediately. The FBI warns against attempts to confront suspected suicide bombers. The bomber's primary goal is murder and upon being discovered, he or she may detonate the device.

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