



The Final Word

Failure to Protect

By Bennie Cooley

Because our children are our most valued and precious resource, their care and safety directly impacts our nation's ability to survive and remain free from tyranny. As law enforcement officers and as parents, we strive to protect our children from both internal and external threats. I have personally heard men and women who serve in the armed forces, and are deployed overseas say that the only way they are able to do their job is because they have faith that we will do ours in keeping their children safe. With that in mind, we must realize that the battle is constant, whether it entails keeping our children safe from drugs, gang violence, active shooters or outright terrorist attacks. While drugs and gang violence have definitely taken their toll, they don't have the same impact on our nation as active shooter incidents. And sadly, many noted experts believe it is only a matter of time before our country experiences an organized terrorist attack directed against our children. This attack will be staged to produce mass casualties, similar to what happened in Beslan, Russia, where over 300 children were killed.

Every department, every officer from top to bottom, must take the threat of an active shooter seriously and be dedicated to preventing it. How serious are we about this? Do our actions match our words? As an example, take a look at your local School Resource Officer. Is he the officer you would pick to be there if your own child were being hunted down? Or, is this position primarily being filled with departmental underachievers – you know the ones, those officers who have trouble fitting in anywhere else, so we just stick them in the schools. Does your local SRO have

the right tools to deal with initial attacks of an active shooter or worse, a terrorist group? How about his mindset and training – do they match his mission? How many advanced training schools has he attended?

Most school hallways are easily over 75 yards long, yet we normally only allow the SRO to carry a handgun, if that. If he happens to have a rifle, it is usually kept in his patrol car, which could easily be five minutes away. We also don't train or allow patrol officers to utilize diversionary devices unless they are a member of the SWAT team. Why is this? What if the first-responding patrol officer needs a diversionary device to gain the attention of an active shooter? Think about this – he is allowed to carry a firearm and utilize deadly force, but is not trusted to pull a pin and throw a flash bang.

I've worked with departments that refuse to send anyone in unless there are at least two officers on-scene. Because every second counts, if we take on this strategy, we will fail to protect innocent lives when faced with an active shooter incident. With the right training and equipment, one officer can readily move to contact and defeat, or at least preoccupy an active shooter, preventing him from inflicting further casualties. If we are faced with a terrorist group, we have to wait for additional officers and we must be able to formulate a plan that will allow us to attack quickly and decisively. However, we must remember that time is not on our side.

There is also some confusion when it comes to determining whether the attackers are active shooters or terrorists. An organized terrorist group will want to prevent us from making entry, meaning that while the core group is

attacking innocents within the school, they will have someone designated to contact your department. By establishing communications, they will attempt to buy more time. Their demands or threats will be simple; "Enter the school and we will kill everyone, we want to negotiate." They know if they don't achieve negotiation status and the time that process buys, they will have to fight us immediately. And, this is not in their best interests. They want time to prepare so that they can attack on their terms, not ours. We will never get this call from an active shooter. Remember, active shooters are cowards.

It has been said that no success outside of the home can replace failure in the home. To this, I would add that no amount of success we experience on the street, can make up for failure to protect our children from active shooters in their schools. We must continue to pool our assets (and those of the community) to prevent, deter and if necessary, resolve active shooter incidents. While Americans have experienced the tragedy and emotional impact of active shooter incidents many times before, we have yet to experience a full-blown organized terrorist attack on our children. Now is the time to take threats to our children seriously. We must prepare and make sure we have the dedication and knowledge necessary to combat and hopefully prevent a tragedy similar to that experienced in Beslan.

About the author

Bennie Cooley is the director of CRTIC Inc. and has over 23 years experience in Counter Terrorism and SWAT training. He has won five UPSA 3-Gun National Championships, three SOF 3-Gun World Championships, 2 National SWAT Team Championships and the 2005 World Sniper Championship. You may email Bennie at crtc@ida.net. ●