



Ambulance Bomb Decimates Shopping District in Kabul – Explosives hidden in a stolen ambulance were detonated at a security checkpoint in a busy shopping district in central Kabul last Saturday, killing 103 and injuring more than 230 people. The blast occurred about a mile from the U.S. embassy and NATO headquarters. “Most of the victims are civilians,” said a police spokesman. “It was a terrible attack that killed women, children, shopkeepers and visitors to the area.” The Taliban, who carried out several attacks in the capital city and across Afghanistan in recent weeks, claimed responsibility.



Assessment: Departments use various ways to ensure that their vehicles and personnel are legitimate, including IDs, vehicle stickers and placards, and through official gear. Unfortunately, when uniforms, gear, equipment, radios and vehicles are suspected to be stolen, it must be considered if it will be used for criminal or nefarious intent, including terrorist strikes. It takes one to know one: responders will be the best judge on whether or not a vehicle or uniformed person seems suspicious, possibly through minor inaccuracies in their dress or use of vernacular, mannerisms or even behavior. Any suspicious activity should immediately be reported to superiors and law enforcement.

Amtrak GOP Train Collides with Truck in Virginia – A chartered train carrying House and Senate Republicans slammed into a garbage truck while traveling to their annual retreat in West Virginia. The crash occurred in Crozet, Virginia [where](#) one passenger was killed and several others were injured. Law enforcement officials are still monitoring the situation, but did not [believe](#) there was any criminal activity. The crossing where the crash occurred was [protected](#) by gates, flashing lights, bells, and warning signs. The NTSB is now conducting a deeper investigation into the incident.

Assessment: Unlike the recent train crash in Washington State, which involved major infrastructure components (Amtrak railway and Interstate 5) in a busy corridor, this incident occurred in a more remote section of Virginia. Immediately after the accident, several Republican lawmakers, who are also doctors, sprang into action to treat the injured victims. They were [joined](#) by other nurses and paramedics on board the train who had some basic medical gear. A former Army surgeon, Representative Neal Dunn (Florida) and others broke into three [teams](#) to treat the injured passengers of the garbage truck. Emergency personnel should anticipate potential public response during different disasters. Responders must recall their training and have the mental capacity to organize manpower and equipment during the most chaotic incidents.

Subject in Two-Day Hotel Standoff Started Fires – A police response to a University of Minnesota hotel evolved into a 38-hour standoff with a distressed 43-year-old man who claimed to have a gun, held a hostage and started fires in the room. According to relatives, the subject was struggling with losing his teenage daughter to suicide in 2014, as well as a cat recently, and had an arrest warrant in Arizona. During the standoff, the man also threw a microwave out the hotel window. Eventually the incident was resolved when a SWAT team forced entry. No gun was found on the subject or in the room.

Assessment: The potential for fire, particularly coupled with a gunman, is strong reason to evacuate a building in standoff situations. Incident commanders must weigh the potential for fire versus known or unknown weaponry. In Roseville, California in 2010, a distressed and suicidal young man intimidated the staff of a GameStop, the possession of an explosive in a backpack. This caused an evacuation and standoff, during which he lit a fire that resulted in \$55 million in damage to the mall—and he had no weapon. Sprinklers are a big part of the equation in either case, and were shut down at the Roseville Galleria.



Car used in ramming with Good Samaritan truck in background

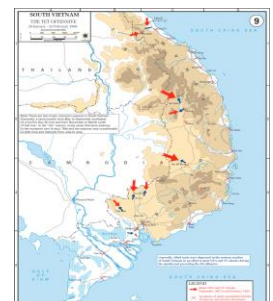
Civilian, Off-Duty Cop Stop Philadelphia Ramming Attack – The driver of a Honda sedan who hit one pedestrian, who was flipped onto the hood, and then (according to witnesses) attempted to strike others on a Philadelphia street early Monday, was first halted by the driver of a pick-up truck who penned him, followed by an off-duty police detective. After first chasing after the Good Samaritan, 31-year-old Khalil Lawal of Virginia was then confronted by the off-duty officer, when the six-foot-plus, 250 pound driver “immediately” became “aggressive” with him, striking him and trying to get his gun, according to Philadelphia Police Commissioner Richard Ross.

Assessment: In addition to the heroic actions of the pick-up driver and off-duty detective, it was decisions by the driver-attacker that limited casualties. After hitting the pedestrian, he went on, but then made a U-turn, seeking additional victims in the same vicinity. This both allowed for the intervention, which stopped him, and only offered him pedestrians who were already fleeing, while also tempering his speed. The deadliest ramming attacks in recent years all involved a straight-line route (with purposeful weaving), allowing for higher speeds and unsuspecting victims. The lesson will likely be received by subsequent attackers, but for responders, the take-away is how to alert others down the line.

Captured Homegrown Jihadist Attackers Remain Emboldened – Ahmed Khan Rehami, convicted in the Chelsea bombers this month, has not only shown no remorse for his crimes, but has made light of his attacks, had to be separated from other inmates for trying to radicalize them, and bragged [“I am the news.”](#) In a letter to a friend, he called his lawyer, the judge, prosecutor, and jury “kaffirs,” indicating that they (we) are beneath contempt, and called himself a soldier in a war. Similarly, 20-year-old Mahad Abdirahman, defiantly [told a court](#) last week that he “went to Mall of America to answer the call for Jihad,” when he stabbed two people in a Macy’s in November. It was originally widely reported that the stabbing was retaliation for the pair thwarting his attempted stealing of merchandise.

Assessment: In following threats, attacks, and trends, analysis tends toward the here-and-now, or very recent, and the thugs responsible for attacks on innocents are gladly forgotten about. However, there are also times, such as in the Mall of America stabbing, or possibly the Philadelphia ramming, where the motive—often connected to the identifiers of the attackers—becomes muted or lost. (Misleading headlines are also unhelpful: [Erratic driver fatally shot by off-duty officer in Philadelphia](#)) These two homegrown jihadists have been quite explicit in their utter hatred for America and Americans. We need to listen, because while groups may wax and wane, ideologies are long-lived.

50th Anniversary of Tet Offensive Spurs Veracity of News Debate – The North Vietnamese Army (NVA), along with indigenous communist forces in the south (Viet Cong), began a month-long, coordinated military campaign against South Vietnam on Jan. 30, 1968. Saigon, along with 100 other cities and towns, were hit hard, but U.S. forces and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) eventually repelled the offensive, though at a high cost. Tactically, the communists suffered terrible losses in the campaign and won little territory, if any, but, strategically, it was considered a victory as the media coverage of American soldier casualties had a great effect on the U.S. population, who watched evening news broadcasts in the first “Living Room War.” Historians state that Tet influenced the '68 presidential election and precipitated the U.S. withdrawal.



Assessment: Much like a terrorist campaign, the Tet Offensive was partly a message sent to the U.S. population via the media, and consistent with the 19th century anarchist philosophy of “propaganda of the deed.” The debate continues today on the role of media in wartime. Several stories are circulating that the media’s [overemphasis](#) on American casualties, or even [not knowing](#) of enemy fatalities and positions, gave Americans a narrow view of the war, as other anniversary coverage states that American losses remained alarmingly high even [after Tet](#). Intel.gov has released the first documents in its [“Tet Declassified”](#) series.