

Senate Committee on Homeland Security & Governmental Affairs
“Lessons from the Mumbai Terrorist Attacks”
Dirksen Senate Office Building – SD-342
Thursday, January 8, 2009 –1:30 p.m.

Senator Lieberman, Senator Collins, members of the committee. Thank you for inviting me to speak about lessons that the New York City Police Department has drawn from the attacks in Mumbai.

Within hours of the end of the attacks, the NYPD notified the Indian government that we would be sending personnel there. On December 1, we dispatched three senior officers. Their assignment was to gather as much information as possible about the tactics used in the attack. This is in keeping with a practice we have followed for several years. In all cases, our officers do not take part in investigative activity. In Mumbai, our officers toured crime scenes, took photographs, and asked questions of police officials. They relayed what they learned back to New York.

These officers are part of the Police Department’s overseas liaison program in which we post experienced personnel to 11 cities around the world. They partner with local police and intelligence agencies and respond when terrorist incidents occur. In this case, the most senior officer in the group had served as a liaison in Amman, Jordan. In July 2006, when seven bombs exploded in Mumbai trains and railway stations, he flew to the city on a similar mission. The relationships he forged during that trip proved helpful in November.

As you know, it is believed that the perpetrators of both attacks were members of the radical Islamic group Lashkar-e-Taiba, which has been fighting Indian security forces for decades. From the perspective of the New York City Police Department, one of the most important aspects of this attack was the shift in tactics from suicide bombs to a commando-style military assault with small teams of highly trained, heavily armed operatives launching simultaneous, sustained attacks. They fanned out across the city in groups of two and four. They carried AK-56 assault rifles, a Chinese manufactured copy of the Russian AK-47. It holds a 30-round magazine with a firing rate of 600 to 650 rounds per minute. In addition,

the terrorists each carried a duffel bag loaded with extra ammunition, an average of 300 to 400 rounds contained in as many as 12 magazines, along with half a dozen grenades, and one plastic explosive, or i.e.d.

The attackers displayed a sophisticated level of training, coordination, and stamina. They fired in controlled, disciplined bursts. When our liaisons toured the hotels and railways stations, they saw from bullet holes that shots were fired in groups of three aimed at head level. With less experienced shooters, you'd see bullet holes in the ceiling and floor. This group had extensive practice. And the number of casualties shows it. Ten terrorists managed to kill or injure over 500 people. They were experienced in working together as a unit. For example, they used hand signals to communicate across loud and crowded spaces. And they were sufficiently disciplined to continue their attack over many hours. This had the effect of increasing the public's fear and keeping the incident in the news cycle for a longer period of time. These are a few of the differences from what we've seen before.

Consistent with previous attacks around the world were some of the features of the target city: the country's financial capital, a densely populated, multi-cultural metropolis, and a hub for the media and entertainment industries. Obviously, these are also descriptions of New York City.

The attackers focused on the most crowded public areas and centers of western and Jewish activity. This too is of interest to the Police Department. The two New Yorkers who were killed were prominent members of the Chabad Lubavitch religious movement which is based in Brooklyn.

We are also mindful that the attackers approached Mumbai from the water. That's obviously an issue in a major port city like New York. For that reason, our Harbor officers are trained in and equipped with automatic weapons. They have special authority to board any ships that enter the port. Our divers inspect the hulls of cruise ships and other vessels, as well as the piers they use, for underwater explosive devices. We engage in joint exercises with the National Park Service to protect the Statue of Liberty from any waterborne assault and

heavily armed Emergency Service officers board the Queen Mary Two at Ambrose Light before it enters New York Harbor to make certain no one tries to take over this iconic ship when it enters city waters. These are a few examples.

As much as we do, the NYPD, even with the Coast Guard's assistance, cannot fully protect the harbor, especially when one considers the vast amounts of uninspected cargo that enters the Port of New York and New Jersey. I have testified before about the urgent need for better port and maritime security. Mumbai was just another reminder.

Our liaisons arrived in Mumbai on December 2, three days after the attacks ended. By December 5, our Intelligence Division had produced an analysis, which we shared with the FBI. That morning we convened a special meeting with the members of NYPD Shield. This is an alliance between the Police Department and about 3,000 private security managers based in the New York area. We had the leader of our team in Mumbai call in and speak directly to the audience. We posted photographs and maps to help them visualize the locations. We also reviewed a list of best practices in hotel security. This is a set of items we routinely share when our counterterrorism officers conduct trainings for hotel security.

Through another partnership, Operation Nexus, NYPD detectives have made thousands of visits to the kind of companies terrorists might seek to exploit—truck rental businesses or hotels, for example. We let them know what to look for and what to do if they observe suspicious behavior. With hotels, we focus on protecting the exterior of a building from vehicle-borne threats. But we also emphasize knowing who's in your building and recognizing that the attack may be initiated from inside the facility. We talk about how to identify hostile surveillance or the stockpiling of materials, controlling points of entry, and having a thorough knowledge of floor plans and a widely distributed emergency action plan.

In Mumbai, the attackers appeared to know their targets better than responding commandos. With this in mind, since the beginning of December, the New York City Police Department has toured several major hotels. Supervisors in our Emergency Service Unit are documenting

the walkthroughs on video camera, filming entrances and exits, lobbies, unoccupied guest rooms, and banquet halls. We plan to use the videos as training tools.

Through a vast public private partnership—our Lower Manhattan Security Initiative—we also have access to hundreds of private security cameras owned and operated by our private sector partners in Manhattan’s financial district. These are monitored in a newly opened coordination center downtown.

In an active shooter incident such as we saw in Mumbai, by far the greatest number of casualties occur in the first minutes of the attack. Part of the reason the members of Lashkar-e-Taiba were able to inflict severe casualties was that, for the most part, the local police did not engage them. Their weapons were not sufficiently powerful and they were not trained for that type of conflict. It took more than 12 hours for Indian commandos to arrive.

By contrast, the Police Department’s Emergency Service Unit is trained in the use of heavy weapons and the kind of close quarter battle techniques employed in Mumbai. In addition, we’ve taken a number of steps to share this training more widely among our officers. On December 15, 16, and 17, our police recruits received basic instruction in three types of heavy weapons. They learned about the weapons’ operating systems, how to load and unload, and how to fire them. They were the first class to receive what will now be a routine part of police academy training.

On December 5, we conducted two exercises, one a tactical drill for Emergency Service Unit officers, the other a tabletop exercise for commanders. Both scenarios were based on the attacks in Mumbai.

In the exercise with our command staff, we raised the possibility that we might have to deploy our Emergency Service officers too thinly in the event of multiple simultaneous attacks such as those in Mumbai. We also recognized that if the attacks continued over many hours, we would need to relieve our special units with rested officers. In response to both challenges, we have decided to provide heavy weapons training to experienced officers in our Organized Crime Control Bureau. They will be able to play a supplementary role in an

emergency. Similarly, we decided to use the instructors in our Firearms and Tactics Unit as another reserve force. Combined, these officers will be prepared to support our Emergency Service Unit in the event of a Mumbai-style attack.

The other issue that we examined in our exercise last month, and that was the subject of a New York Times article yesterday, is the ability of terrorist handlers to direct operations from outside the attack zone using cell phones and other portable communications devices. With this comes a formidable capacity to adjust tactics while attacks are underway.

We also discussed the complications of media coverage that could disclose law enforcement tactics in real time. This phenomenon is not new. In the past, police were able to defeat any advantage it might give hostage takers by cutting off power to the location they were in. However, the proliferation of handheld devices would appear to trump that solution. When lives are at stake, law enforcement needs to find ways to disrupt cell phones and other communications in a pinpointed way against terrorists who are using them.

All of the measures I have discussed are part of a robust counterterrorism program we built from the ground up in 2002, when we realized that it in addition to our focus on crime-fighting, the Police Department needed to build the intelligence collection, analysis, and infrastructure protection capabilities to defend New York City from another terrorist attack.

We established the nation's first municipal counterterrorism bureau, and we restructured our Intelligence Division. We recruited the best that the federal government had to offer to head those two operations. We created a new civilian intelligence program to support our field commanders with timely information and analysis. We tapped the incredible linguistic diversity of the police department. We assigned native speakers of languages such as Arabic, Urdu, and Pashto to counterterrorism duties. We strengthened our patrols of key infrastructure in the city, including bridges, tunnels, and a host of landmarks and other sensitive locations. We forged collaborative relationships with the private sector, with law enforcement organizations up and down the east coast, and with federal agencies, especially the FBI and the Department of Homeland Security.

In the last seven years, working with the FBI through the Joint Terrorist Task Force, we've stopped multiple plots against New York City. I know that this productive collaboration will continue to thrive. I also want to express my appreciation for the progress that's been made in processing the Police Department's "Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act" requests at a pace that is in keeping with that of events around the world. This has made an important difference.

The Police Department's strongest and most innovative regional partnership is the one supported by the Department of Homeland Security, our Securing the Cities program. This is an unprecedented initiative to protect New York with advanced radiation detection devices installed at all points of access to the five boroughs, including roads, bridges, tunnels, and waterways. We now train and share information with dozens of neighboring jurisdictions.

Of course, this is the last line of defense we have. Our preference is to stop an attack in the earliest planning stages. But, in an evolving threat environment, we must proceed on many levels simultaneously. The international threat of terrorism is not going away. Terrorists are thinking creatively about new tactics. So must we. And while we have to learn from Mumbai and prepare to defend ourselves against a similar attack, we cannot focus too narrowly on any one preventive method. We need to go back to basics, strengthen our defense on every front, stay sharp, well-trained, well-equipped, and constantly vigilant. And we must continue to work together at every level of government to defeat those would harm us.

I want to thank the committee members for your crucial support in making this possible, and for this opportunity to share lessons learned.