



# TRAINING BULLETIN

Los Angeles Police Department

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## **TERRORISM – PART I HOMICIDE BOMBERS**

September 11, 2001 illustrated to the world that terrorists would go to any lengths, including suicide to commit mass murder. Several terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda have targeted the United States due to our international foreign policy. Al-Qaeda sees the West, and the United States in particular, as the enemy of Islam. This makes the United States and its allies prime targets for a terrorist attack.

Since 2000, the frequency of these attacks has increased dramatically. Homicide bombers utilize this method of terrorism to convey a message to its target audience, and the randomness of the act serves to instill fear. The term homicide bomber has come to replace what had been called a suicide bomber, since the bomber's intent is to commit homicide, not suicide. While there has been attempts to date, there has been no successful homicide bombings (human body bomb) conducted within the United States. However, in the interest of public safety and current international trends, it is prudent to study these incidents and develop effective law enforcement counter-measures.

Terrorist attacks take many forms, including bombs in cars, trucks, airplanes, boats, motorcycles, or carried by humans as well as drive-by shootings and active shooters. This Training Bulletin will narrow the focus to homicide bombers. The purpose of this Training Bulletin is to assist officers in identifying a homicide bomber and to provide tactical considerations when attempting to interdict a homicide bomber.

On New Year's Eve 1999, an al-Qaeda trained terrorist planned to carry out an attack at the Los Angeles International Airport by placing a large suitcase bomb at the Tom Bradley International Terminal. The suspect was arrested prior to carrying out the bombing. The threat still remains because al-Qaeda trained terrorists are mission oriented and will continue to attack the same target until they are successful (World Trade Center attacks in 1993 and 2001).

On February 17, 2012, Amine El Khalifi attempted to detonate a bomb in an attack on the United States Capitol Building as part of what he intended to be a terrorist operation. El Khalifi traveled to a parking garage near the United States Capitol Building, and took possession of an automatic weapon and put on a vest containing what he believed to be a functioning bomb. Unbeknownst to El Khalifi, a successful undercover operation which was closely monitored by the Federal Bureau of

Investigation rendered the explosives and firearm inoperable, and posed no threat to the public. He walked alone from the vehicle toward the United States Capitol, where he intended to shoot people and detonate the bomb. El Khalifi was arrested and taken into custody before exiting the parking garage.

On December 11, 2017, Akayed Ullah successfully detonated a pipe bomb strapped to his body in Manhattan's busiest subway corridor near Times Square in retaliation for United States airstrikes on ISIS targets. Ullah attached the pipe bomb to himself with Velcro and zip ties, but the makeshift device failed to fully detonate, and he was the only one seriously injured in the blast. The explosion filled parts of the Port Authority Bus Terminal with smoke as commuters fled. Port Authority police officers subdued Ullah as he lay with burns to his hands and abdomen.

Homicide bombers generally target areas of dense population or specific high profile events. In Los Angeles, this would include the downtown and harbor areas, movie studios, and high profile entertainment events that attract large assemblages of people as well as live media coverage.

## **THE HOMICIDE BOMBER – BACKGROUND**

Like the individuals involved in the September 11, 2001 attack, homicide bombers are well trained to carry out their mission. Terrorist groups like Hamas and Hezbollah have been using homicide bombers for years against the civilian population in Israel. These groups provide the best model of how homicide bombers are used against a civilian population.

School age children are indoctrinated to idolize those who martyr themselves as homicide bombers. Training camps located throughout the world teach terrorist tactics and mentally prepare the bombers for martyrdom. Some terrorist organizations train personnel for months in order to prepare for a single attack.

The rewards for martyrdom may include both religious and financial promises. The resulting hero status and financial rewards supply a never-ending stream of recruits who are willing to become homicide bombers.

## **TERRORIST TACTICS**

An attack by a homicide bomber is well organized, and involves up to four distinct groups to carry out the functions necessary for a successful attack.

The first group recruits and trains potential homicide bombers. This group conducts interviews to determine the motivation of the martyr recruit and ensure that they have the mental stability to complete the mission.

The second group determines the target and type of explosive device necessary. This group accomplishes planning, surveillance, and reconnaissance of the target. Officers should **immediately contact Major Crimes Division** if they encounter any person they believe is engaged in this type of activity.

The third group assembles the bomb. The bomb is usually worn on the body in a belt or vest, or carried in a bag or backpack. In most cases, additional fragmentation is added to increase the lethality of the bomb.

The fourth group delivers the bomb to the homicide bomber. This group will then act as a support team, escorting the bomber to the target. The support team will provide security to the bomber, much like a “layoff man” at a robbery. The bomber does not normally become aware of the target until the last possible moment to maintain motivation. Only at the last minute is the bomber instructed on how to activate the bomb. **Officers need to be acutely aware of the presence of the support team if they encounter a suspected bomber.**

The body bomb is commonly worn on the upper torso in the form of a belt or vest (see attached photos). These devices are easily detonated by activating a toggle or rocker-type switch, which is either attached to the mid-section of the vest or carried in the hand. There may be a secondary detonation system present to allow detonation of the device even if law enforcement personnel interdict the bomber. Secondary timing devices may include a timing system or a fuse that is lit when the bomber arrives within close proximity to the target.

Officers need to be aware that a bomb can be placed in a backpack, briefcase, suitcase, or any other large item that could conceal the explosives. Common items used in the past to disguise bombs include guitars, computers, and even a watermelon. The majority of these bombs are activated by the simple means of pushing a button or flipping a switch. In some incidents, cell phones have been used to activate the device.

Once the bomber arrives at the target location, the bomber will attempt to move to the center of the crowd to maximize the casualties. If confronted, the bomber will usually detonate the bomb, rather than be taken into custody. Just before activation of the bomb, the bomber will often raise both arms in the air to prevent any mitigation of the fragmentation and shrapnel caused by the presence of the bomber’s own body parts.

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF A HOMICIDE BOMBER**

The following list of distinguishing characteristics was compiled by analyzing recent homicide bombing attacks in the Middle East. These characteristics are **not all-inclusive**, but may be utilized to establish reasonable suspicion to identify and detain potential homicide bombers.

Because patrol officers are highly visible, they need to be familiar with these

characteristics due to the potential for a chance encounter with a terrorist member. Officers may receive a radio call of suspicious activity from a variety of sources. Terrorists may be surveilling a target, renting a truck, or buying bomb making components, which may raise the suspicion of the public. Additionally, officers may observe a traffic violation and during the encounter see photos, diagrams, or bomb components. **The knowledge and initial observations of the officer are critical to establish reasonable suspicion to detain and probable cause to further investigate the activity.** Officers should look for more than one characteristic when making their initial observations before drawing conclusions of reasonable suspicion of a homicide bomber.

#### **BIOGRAPHICAL DATA**

- Mostly unmarried males, although recently some females.
- Males between 16-40 years old.
- Females between 16-25 years old.
- Ethnicity may vary.

#### **CLOTHING DESCRIPTION**

- The manner of dress is chosen to conceal a bomb.
- Occasionally dressed as woman (pregnant).
- Inappropriate for warmer temperatures.
- Will be baggy, ill fitting, unusually long or heavy.
- Overly elegant.
- Disguised to blend into community surroundings.
- Stolen uniforms.

#### **PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION**

- Blank stare, wide-eyed, unresponsive, perspiring or preoccupied.
- Gaunt appearance (may look ill).
- Smiling or grinning (possibly due to thinking about the rewards in the afterlife).
- Muttering or talking to self (saying a prayer).
- Any other stress-related symptom associated with imminent death.

The following peculiar characteristics may be present because of the concealed bomb:

- Torso appears unusually bulky or inflated.
- Unusual or suspicious bulges.
- Torso appears stiff, or lacks flexibility.
- Uneven gait, difficulty walking.
- Visible explosive-laden belts, protruding from under clothing.
- Carrying a heavy or unbalanced backpack, suitcase, box or knapsack.
- Switch wire hanging from the sleeve.

The following are less common, but also may be present:

- Possibly clean or freshly shaven – face and body, closely cropped hair. This is a ceremonial religious act that has become less common since it makes homicide bombers easy to identify.
- Herbal or chemical smell emitting from the person due to the presence of poison(s) added to the device.

## **LEGAL REVIEW**

It is important for responding officers to understand the legal and policy requirements for reasonable suspicion, probable cause and the use of deadly force when attempting to investigate a potential homicide bomber.

### Reasonable Suspicion

Reasonable suspicion is the standard used to justify a detention. It exists when an officer has specific and articulable facts that lead an officer to reasonably believe that:

- Unusual activity has occurred, is occurring or is about to occur and
- Unusual activity is related to a crime and
- The person detained is connected with the unusual activity.

When developing reasonable suspicion, officers should consider the following factors: the location, the manner of dress, the weather, the suspect's overall appearance and actions. For example, if the suspect looks inflated, is wearing a heavy trench coat in hot weather, and walking towards a large crowded location, the officers may attempt a detention.

### Probable Cause

- The state of facts that would cause a reasonable and trained officer (or person of similar training and experience) to form an honest and strong suspicion that the person to be arrested has committed a crime.

### Deadly Force (Department Manual Section 1/556.10)

Officers shall use deadly force upon another person only when the officer reasonably believes, based on the totality of the circumstances, that such force is necessary for either of the following reasons:

- To defend against an imminent threat of death or serious bodily injury to the officer or to another person; or,
- To apprehend a fleeing person for a felony that threatened or resulted in death or serious bodily injury, if the officer reasonably believes that the person will cause death or serious bodily injury to another unless immediately apprehended. Where feasible, a peace officer shall, prior to the use of force, make reasonable efforts to identify themselves as a peace officer and to warn that deadly force may be used, unless the officer has objectively reasonable grounds to believe the person is aware of those facts.



- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

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## CONCLUSION

In the interest of public safety, it is imperative that law enforcement assume a proactive role in countering homicide bombers. Officers can help prevent attacks by remaining vigilant to signs of terrorism, reporting suspicious activity, understanding trends and being tactically prepared. As stated previously, there is no precise formula to be applied to a homicide bomber incident. Police officer and public safety will always remain our highest priorities.

**This Bulletin cancels and supersedes Volume XXXIV, Issue 8, Terrorism Part I – Homicide Bombers, September 2002**

Field Training Services Unit  
Police Training and Education

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## Homicide Bomb Vest

Front View

Back View

