



What the Oct 7th Attack on Israel Has Taught Us So Far



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On November 2, 2023, Professor Bruce Hoffman spoke to the Tucson Committee on Foreign Relations about Hamas' recent attacks on Israel. In his presentation, he shed light on 5 key lessons learned from this attack regarding terrorism.

Lesson 1: Determined Terrorists Will Overcome Technological Superiority

Although many countries know Israel as a global technological and entrepreneurial powerhouse, their impressive tech superiority and well-equipped defense forces were not sufficient to prevent the attack on October 7th. This emphasizes Hoffman's critical observation that determined terrorists will find a way to overcome technological superiority. This echoes the experience of the USA in Afghanistan, reiterating the power of asymmetric warfare where unconventional tactics prevail over advanced technology.

Lesson 2: Terrorism Remains a Top Tier National Security Priority

Hoffman emphasized the consequences of failing to recognize terrorism as a serious threat as it can lead to vulnerabilities, as witnessed in Israel. He explained how Hamas' success was partially due to the internal preoccupations that Israel had, stating that the rolling protests impacted their preparedness and response. Hamas' coordinated, simultaneous attacks were designed to overwhelm first responders and collapse response by shattering decision making and command chain.

With these types of attacks becoming the hallmark of terrorists, I ponder the following questions:

- *Do we currently have enough first responders, equipment, hospital resources, and staff to adequately handle such attacks?*
- *Should the US prioritize investments in emergency infrastructure and develop a clear public response strategy to mitigate potential casualties?*
- *With elections on the horizon, will terrorism emerge as a pivotal voter concern?*

Lesson 3: False Sense of Security Breeds Chaos, Disorder, & Tragedy

Since Israel felt confident that they were powerful and technologically advanced enough to defend themselves against any attack, they focused their energy inwards, trying to dissolve domestic turbulence. This unfortunately left them distracted and vulnerable to Hamas' attack. Despite having one of the most formidable militaries in the Middle East, Israel was caught off guard with no time to prepare or respond. Delayed responses, as observed in Israel post-attack, showcased the consequences of this false sense of security.

One of the most memorable points Hoffman made about this lesson is that, prior to this attack, countries hesitated to challenge Israel, perceiving it as too powerful and advanced to defeat. However, countries are now starting to reconsider the strength of these "powerhouses." Hoffman noted a shift in focus toward the US, questioning if the US is just as susceptible as Israel was.

- *Given the US's internal divisions and involvement in multiple global conflicts, are other nations considering it as a vulnerable target for attacks?*
- *How should the US mitigate its vulnerability?*
- *How likely is an attack on the US?*

Lesson 4: Terrorism Has Become As Intersectional As It Is International

Terrorism is not only international, but also intersectional in that it spans across different ideological, religious, and political spectrums Hoffman mentioned how there are an

accumulation of extremist groups such as Neo-Nazis, White Supremacists, and Anarchists that make terrorism far more complex by adding the threat of domestic terrorism.

Lesson 5: The First Casualty When War Comes Is Truth

One of the most concerning points Hoffman discussed was the impact of social media on terrorism. He explained that the first to report casualties on social media is perceived as more truthful. This was seen in the Oct. 7th attack when Hamas posted on social media that Israel had bombed Palestinian hospitals, despite being false. Many credible news sources such as the Wall Street Journal disseminated this information, amplifying chaos and division.

Social media also plays a major role in pushing extremist propaganda and uniting people with similar interests and ideologies. By using ISIS' model of live streaming attacks and promoting ultra violence to encourage recruitment and radicalization, Hamas, and other terrorist groups are gaining attention and followings.

Taking all this into consideration, it raises questions such as:

- *Should social media firms face liability for extremist group congregations or misinformation?*
- *Is censorship necessary to curb the spread of radical ideas?*
- *Are social media algorithms inadvertently fueling extremist groups with tailored content?*

What Can We Expect?

In the aftermath of this attack, these five lessons offer vital insights for preparing the US for future uncertainties, emphasizing the need for proactive global measures, comprehensive understanding of modern terrorism, and collaborative efforts towards lasting peace in conflict zones.

However, Hoffman suggests that the destruction of Hamas should pave the way for border solutions, recognizing the importance of Palestinian self-determination and possibly reevaluating the one-state vs. two-state agreement debate. For Israel's success in the coming year, efforts to neutralize Hamas' military capabilities, secure hostage's release, and collaborate with Arab states for Gaza's reconstruction and security are pivotal.

Sources:

Professor Bruce Hoffman Speech Nov. 2, 2023