



Da Vinci's Horse: Perspectives on Decision Making in Crisis

Part 3 - The Will to Prepare

you can't play baseball with clinched teeth – George Will

we have nothing to fear but fear itself – Franklin Delano Roosevelt

they created within themselves the will not to believe – Hermann Wouk

the worst profanity-it won't happen here – John Giduck

Less than a month after the shootings at Virginia Tech, on Sunday, May, 7th, Muslim extremists in long white robes attacked a children's festival at a U.N.-run elementary school with guns and homemade bombs, killing a politician's bodyguard in plain view of terrified youngsters. The attack on the school in the southern Gaza refugee camp of Rafah began with a protest by Muslim extremists in long robes, who said a sports festival the school was hosting was un-Islamic. The U.N. "is turning schools into nightclubs," read one sign held up by the protesters. At one point, as the group tried to enter the school, Palestinian security fired in the air to keep them away. In the ensuing chaos, at least one bomb was thrown into the school, and a gun battle followed. Children hid under their chairs during the fighting. As you read this, how stands the world of violence?



For a quick check see *A Global Display of Terrorism and other Suspicious Events* (<http://www.globalincidentmap.com/home.php>).

Our news anchors constantly pose the question “are we safer today...?” meaning is our government doing a better job of protecting “we the people.” Maybe a better question would be how capable are we to take care of ourselves? This is worth some contemplation of our overall public knowledge, thinking, and action as they relate to our safety within our homeland. The world gives us ample evidence of its dangers but despite the growth in nations, armies to protect us and our interests since the Treaty of Westphalia, no matter our technical sophistication, neither the United States, with its ocean barriers, nor any nation appears safe from the asymmetric threats emerging out of the last days of the old century. We live on a frontier. With great respect to those who only tried to defend their homes from the white man’s intrusion, we still must survive in “Indian Country.” The Virginia Tech incident provides significant evidence of the concerns offered by the following authors, and suggests strongly that we are, in their words, not doing our homework very well and indeed, nearly six years after *that* Tuesday morning, we remain stuck between *contemplation and preparation*.



This essay, a third part to *Da Vinci's Horse*, leverages the thoughts of three of the featured authors and focuses on what must be a significant actionable learning moment –Virginia Tech, 16 April, 2007- to provide one perspective on how we might better “orient” ourselves in crisis and therefore, improve our changes to manage a crisis before it becomes a disaster.

Brian Michael Jenkins, senior advisor to the president of RAND Corporation, is widely considered one of the world’s foremost authorities on terrorism. In his recent book, *Unconquerable Nation; Knowing Our Enemy, Strengthening Ourselves*, he reflects that while the terrorist threat is real, the way it is portrayed and perceived in the United States adds layers of fear to the point that we sometimes seem determined to terrorize ourselves. He suggests that this fear, and expectations about government protection, lead to approaches that simply don’t work. “The best way to increase our ability as a nation to respond to disasters, natural or man-made, is to enlist all citizens through education and engagement, which also happens to be a very good way to reduce the persistent anxieties that afflict us.” We have to accept that the world has changed and as



Sun Tzu wrote in the 5th Century B.C., we must know the enemy and ourselves. Jenkins offers we have done little of either.

In Americans at Risk; Why We Are Not Prepared for Megadisasters and What We Can Do Now, Dr. Irwin Redlener notes that “though surveys show the public is concerned about the potential for future disasters, this awareness does not seem to translate into enhanced preparedness planning.” He suggests that from the stage of denial (it won’t happen here – call 911 – it’s beyond me) to actual action, “Americans hover somewhere in the middle, between contemplation and preparation...surprised at every new challenge, even those we’ve been warned of repeatedly...We expect government to take care of business by strengthening what is fragile or not secure and by responding when called. But mostly we hope against hope that calamity isn’t around the corner. (As a result) America is failing one of the most important tests of national capability and resolve we have ever faced.”

Dr. Redlener (who is director of the National center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health and president of the Children’s Health Fund) notes that America’s citizens represent (and need to



acknowledge and understand) one component of a necessary five-way partnership, along with first responders, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and government. As part of a recommended nine point roadmap to repair our megadisaster capability, he urges the country to upgrade programs to engage citizen participation in disaster preparedness.

In Terror at Beslan: A Russian Tragedy with Lessons for America's Schools, John Giduck reflects on understanding the need to “go tactical” (meaning, for Law Enforcement, first responders in general, AND community at large, those circumstances so dangerous and complex that special knowledge, interoperability, and support are required). His book is based on being at Beslan and having long term special operations-type professional connections to Russia's counter-terrorism teams.

When he asked Russian experts what the most important things were for America to learn from Beslan, he was frequently told that the number one thing was preparation. Not only is psychological preparation important, but also physical, tactical and mental preparation of everyone. This means that every single person in America including parents, teachers, students, police and



government officials, must be able to respond to terrorism anywhere, at all levels. As a people we must become our own best resource and be ready to act at once, not cowering like victims of abuse, sitting back and waiting for our own government forces to figure it all out, to come save us. The Russians pointed out that terrorists decreasingly take hostages in the conventional sense; they “take people and then kill them.” They insisted that terrorism is everyone’s problem, and every single citizen in America must accept his and her responsibility for dealing with it: “Act or wait to die are your only real choices.”

Given the thoughts of these authors and given that Project White Horse is put forth as a research project and forum for exchange of ideas on time critical decision making, some observation on the decision making at Virginia Tech seems called for. What would be indicated by a short analysis based on Project White Horse 094640 perspective to date?

Friday, May 11, 2007 The associated Press reported that the panel studying the shooting rampage at Virginia Tech held its first public meeting on Thursday. The panel includes specialists in psychology, law, forensics and higher



education, as well as former U.S. homeland security director Tom Ridge. Retired Virginia State Police Superintendent W. Gerald Massengill, chairman of the eight-member commission, had previously released an outline of what he said he hoped panel members could accomplish: scrutiny of the state's mental health system; review of the police response to the shooting; analysis of post-traumatic stress on first responders; and exploration of gun issues, including whether college students should be allowed to carry firearms on campus. Virginia Governor, Timothy Kaine, asked the review panel to focus on three areas:

1. Information on the shooter, how he obtained firearms and his mental health history
2. The time line of events from the shootings in the dormitory to those in Norris Hall, including efforts to stop events at Norris.
3. Response of all agencies, including post-event support to victims, parents, employees

First note that this is common and expected practice in the aftermath of serious events like the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Hurricane Katrina, and the crash of a Blue Angel F/A-18 in South Carolina. But through a



lens defined by Boyd's OODA Loop and the concepts defined in Destruction and Creation (model mismatch with observed reality), something appears lost among the elements of gun control, psychoanalysis, and finding the "Big Because." (If we know the Big B, then next time, we will/won't...!!??!!??)

What's appears lost is the huge element of decision making in crisis, possibly mishandled through lack of orientation to the problem. It is worth reviewing an element from Part One of *Da Vinci's Horse*:

Perspective: Everyday life and particularly catastrophic events will present never ending cycles of increasing mismatches between what we observe and the models of response we have developed. As this occurs, our response must be founded in a continuing wide search for knowledge and expansion of our capability to adapt - stating a thesis, developing a contradictory antithesis, and combining and resolving into a coherent synthesis - a "continuous effort to survive and improve one's capacity for independent action." (Boyd)



This would appear to mirror the comments of House Majority Leader H. Morgan Griffith (R-Salem) who stated "the number one objective they need to do is to make a finding of fact of what could have had an impact on preventing this."

The suggestion is that using the tools previously presented on this site - *Observe-Orient-Decide-Act* Loop, the process of model rejection/ *destruction* and then new model development/*creation* and *Recognition Primed Decision Making* - can in fact lead to significant insight on getting past the syndrome of "can't manage a crisis until it's a crisis," and offer for consideration, elements that could have future impact.

Note that this is not intended in any way as criticism of actions by police and university leadership. I have not been there, certainly don't know what actually took place in the time after the first shooting, and like all, can only surmise based on the media output, which is a use of a data source fraught with peril. But this must be a capturable learning moment.



Let's examine an admittedly loose but reasonable representation of the decision or OODA cycle on April 16, 2007, beginning after report of the first shootings.

Decision Loop path #1

OBSERVATION: Two murders in a dormitory, initial “situational awareness” status indicates possible suspects and motive

ORIENTATION:

Basic background – Schools and children are generally safe, main concern is with sexual predators and kidnapping, universities maintain openness, crime/murders happen every day. (This supports observation and situational awareness context)

Previous experience – Columbine and other school violence incidents reflect “disturbed” student as basis

New Information – No evidence supporting anything other than a possible match of murders with motive and suspect

DECISION: With nothing to support other possibilities – Campus not closed

ACTION: Police continue along crime/murder path



Decision Loop path #2

OBSERVATION: Students being shot in classrooms

ORIENTATION: Situational awareness/evidence indicates one or more shooters. Conclusion – mass murder incident

DECISION: Mass notification of students, Law Enforcement response dictated

ACTION: LE “Active Shooter” assault

OBSERVATION: 32 killed, one shooter suicide

In hind sight, not to close and lock down the campus proved to be a bad decision, but in due regard, in conversation with a senior sheriff’s commander here in my home town, he reflected that based on current reports, understanding and analysis that *there was significant evidence that this was a current relationship-murder, a suspect identified, apprehension activity was underway and in sum total, you don’t close down a town/city every time someone gets murdered. In hindsight a bad decision, but what can you do?*



How could the decision process have created a different decision? Is there analysis that can be shown to indicate a different outcome of the OODA cycle that would have application in the future – not just confirm the bias of hindsight?

So far we have really only looked at the shooter from a threat stand point, but a different approach provides insight by addressing the vulnerability of a college campus to attack. Obviously the consequences of any attack on a college campus are high, but what about the probability of this attack being more than a murder? What ingrained biases might slant our perspective? What would looking at ourselves from the bad guy's perspective tell us about how vulnerable we are?

Re-look at ORIENTATION:

When all evidence pointed one direction, the assessment process was in what can be classified as “threat analysis.” Given that positive evidence for one line of reasoning exists, lack of evidence of other possibilities means only “no evidence.” It does not negate the possibility that there might be other, maybe numerous, threats or branches and sequels in play. In reality, the evidence supported a situational awareness assessment that confirmed the most likely



situation, making it difficult to take a different path. With no other evidence supporting a Columbine like threat, the decision was made to leave the campus open.

The “orientation” process must now expand its scope, assuming that the model and observations might not prove to be in sync. Since the threat assessment path provides no further insight, we turn to a perspective based on assessing ability to survive a threat (i.e., given a potential threat, the sum total of inability to avoid damage and the inability to withstand that damage).

The Department of Defense Antiterrorism Program, private sector security organizations, and companies that design and manufacture fighter aircraft or tanks all conduct programs concerning physical security and risk management. These include, in various similar processes, assessments and analysis of mission(s), essential functions, threat, vulnerability, survivability, and cost effectiveness. For our purpose of providing orientation insight beyond the perceived threat, we will use one such tool, MSHARPP, generally used for targeting analysis geared towards assessing personnel vulnerabilities. In fact this



is “Red Teaming” - how a terrorist might view a potential target in the planning process. Basic term explanation and key notes for each follow:

1. Mission of the university – educate a large, mostly young student body in an open environment
2. Symbology of Schools/Universities – American culture, learning, open, pride and support of higher education
3. History of attacks on schools (with pertinent results) – Yes, Columbine, others in U.S., Beslan, Israel. Suicide attacks have created great loss and anguish.
4. Accessibility or ease of getting on to campus – College sites are mostly open
5. Recognizability of the school and its various facilities – College campuses very clearly stand out as what they are in layout and look
6. Population - not only how many people but who they are – A country’s youth, its future, the inability to protect has severe impact on public perception
7. Proximity or closeness of assets or facilities that might offer additional security protection close at hand, i.e., be unattractive, or provide more vulnerable targets - campus classroom buildings are normally close, as in a



quadrangle layout – i.e., be more attractive by adding potential for collateral damage

This quick run-through clearly shows that from a terrorist view point our schools are a very attractive target – ease of attack, number of targets, and impact degree on overall target population. But here, there is no evidence of terrorism, so what else could impact the decision process?

To address this question, we must now move to synthesis:

Here is where Giduck's thought on "going tactical" becomes critical. In this case it means a mental mind set shift in "own mission" analysis. The university president must shift from a mission model of administrator including best interest of the school and students in mind, to a tactical model combining the security triangle of *Detect-Delay-Respond* and *Recognition Primed Decision Making*. His focus must be one of recognizing a "situation" rather than analytically selecting among options. It is crucial that this becomes every bit as much his mission description as the local and campus police, and as we shall



show, the ability to **adapt** from *admin* to *tactical* can significantly and positively impact overall actions.

Mission criteria (shifted) – As a tactically thinking leader, mission is to protect personnel and assist in: 1) Detection of threats; 2) once detected, Delaying threat activity; 3) Response operations to the ongoing incident

+ Threat – one apparent legitimate explanation, no evidence of anything else

+ Vulnerability – physically very open, historic response indicates mostly “after the fact,” schools fit within a pattern, and represent “goodness of target”
from attacker’s view

= Result (synthesis): Overall survivability assessment – if lack of evidence is not allowed to outweigh lack of other possibilities, then recognition of possible situation including extreme vulnerability, understanding consequence of a “worst case,” along with recognition of tactical mission, leads to decisions: **close and lock down the campus while notifying all personnel**

With this action, the number of vulnerable persons at risk is minimized and exiting flow would make any persons or persons trying to enter stand out for *detection*/recognition by police. Attacker(s) would then need to hide or exit,



thereby *delaying* or avoiding the attack entirely, thus providing time for extensive campus clearance operations in a non-target rich environment. Law Enforcement operations are now on a controlled active plane, enhancing first responder mission capability and performance, as compared to “active shooter” reactive response “in extremis.”

A RE-ORIENTATION – enlightened mission shift – by the University leadership half of the security decision making process, creates a new response model based on a wider field of view and perspective. The university president no longer acts to select among options based on input from law enforcement; he now focuses on situation assessment, including the vulnerability of his facility, and evaluates new actions by imagining how they will be carried out (enhancing further detection, setting up a delaying process, and creating a more favorable response environment).

- **A different decision outcome possible? Yes**
- **Hindsight based? No. These tools exist, are currently being used and can be easily taught and adapted.**
- **Confirmation bias can be deadly.**



- **Situational Awareness is not the same as understanding the problem; it doesn't include attacker intent. Broadening the field of view, analysis and synthesis required – Orientation.**

Concluding remarks

It is probably worth repeating that this effort was not intended as analysis of the real world decisions, nor is its purpose to show error on the part of Virginia Tech leadership. It does indicate that there are methods available that if used, would provide a significantly different perspective. I would surmise they are not the tools of university or school administrators. If you accept the premises of the authors discussed here, these tools need to be learned by all – administrators, parents, grandparents, citizens all, potential targets all.

No matter the results of Governor Kaine's panel - further information on the shooter, how he obtained firearms, his mental health history, scrutiny of the state's mental health system, review of the police response to the shooting, exploration of gun issues, i.e., understanding the "Big Because" – serious crises and disasters cannot be totally prevented. Arming or disarming every American or creating better scrutiny of student mental health simply won't stop a



dedicated focused attacker nor obviously change Mother Nature's onslaught. But relearning some frontier self reliance and learning more about the world and some new skills might make all the difference.

In the two part WWII epic, *Winds of War* and *War and Remembrance*, Herman Wouk notes a dangerous phenomena manifested by Europe's Jewish community in the face of Nazism rise to power and incredibly, even beyond, as trains continued on day after day to the camps: the will not to believe. John Giduck states early that the single worst profanity is the thought "It won't happen here."

Since that long year of 1776, America has always been blessed by heroes, men and women, who march off to war, like Medal of Honor wearers Colonel Bud Day and Admiral James Stockdale, responding to America's need. I am most certain we always will be so blessed, and indeed they are unquestionably necessary, but I am not certain in today's world, it will be sufficient.

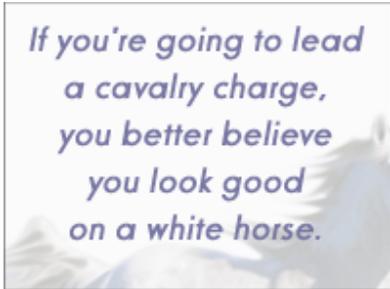


Yesle nye ya, to kto?

We all must do some learning, asking ourselves this question, presented in John Giduck's book – the unofficial motto of Russia's elite counter-terrorism units - "if not me then who?"

It should not be lost in time on any of us the response at Virginia Tech of holocaust survivor, Dr. Liviu Librescu.

You can't play baseball with your teeth clenched, nor live in daily fear and maintain a free society. You don't have to be a victim. You can learn and adapt. You can take on "the will to prepare."

A rectangular box with a light blue background and a faint image of a white horse. The text is centered and written in a blue, italicized serif font.

*If you're going to lead
a cavalry charge,
you better believe
you look good
on a white horse.*

JEB

16 May, 2007