

Responding to Terrorist Attacks on Rail Bound Traffic

Challenges for Inter-organizational Collaboration

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**Responding to Terrorist Attacks on Rail Bound Traffic
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Contemporary terrorism is becoming increasingly indiscriminate, and rail bound traffic appears to be vulnerable and at high risk for terrorist attacks. An attack targeting a train or subway system can have enormous implications, both in terms of human suffering and long-term societal consequences. This dissertation aims to analyze how public and private organizations prepare for and respond to crises emanating from terrorism targeting rail bound traffic. It also examines different practices, networks and ideas related to inter-organizational collaboration. Contemporary research emphasizes the importance and advantages of collaborative action in crisis management, and the idea of inter-organizational collaboration is also embedded in policy documents and has support among practitioners. Despite this, inter-organizational collaboration often turns out to be difficult in practice, and it stands out as a critical factor in many crisis situations. Hence, it is crucial to identify and better understand the challenges associated with inter-organizational collaboration in the context of terrorist-induced crises. This dissertation is a contribution to this endeavor. In order to capture the inherent complexity of the topic this dissertation combines and merges literature from three research fields: crisis management research, disaster medicine research and terrorism studies. The dissertation examines international experiences of terrorist attacks directed against rail bound traffic. It identifies the way in which attacks have changed over time and analyzes the main challenges of providing pre-hospital care following a mass-casualty attack. In addition, Sweden is used to provide empirical focus in an analysis of preparedness. Relying on scenario-based interviews with central crisis management actors and actors from rail bound traffic, current preparedness practices for responding to a multi-site terrorist attack on rail bound traffic in Sweden is analyzed. The research shows that both public and private organizations have developed risk awareness about terrorist-induced crises. However, their preparedness practices are characterized by significant variations and substantial uncertainty. Scarce resources are a critical factor, and actors find it difficult to invest in preparedness for seldom-occurring crises. This difficulty is accentuated by the fact that no major mass-casualty attack has taken place in Sweden. A terrorist attack differs from a routine event and poses new and different challenges for inter-organizational collaboration. A large number of organizations are supposed to work together under severe time constraints, and their work can be delayed by particular security concerns. It is assumed that rail bound traffic actors engage in collaborative crisis management; however, there appear to be few mechanisms to prepare them, in a systematic way, for managing this particular type of crisis. Among actors, inter-organizational collaboration is understood primarily from a normative view rather than from the point of view of its practical meaning. As a consequence, it is difficult to turn risk awareness and a commitment to working together into actual practical action. In addition, collaboration between different levels in the crisis management system is particularly challenging. This dissertation also identifies a tension between viewing crisis management as an example of policy-as-usual or from a crises-as-exceptions perspective.

Keywords: crisis management, terrorism, rail bound traffic, inter-organizational collaboration, disaster medicine, scenario-based planning, preparedness, response, security

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