

## P1 First Person: Are We Prepared for Mumbai in America?

**Editor's Note:** In PoliceOne "First Person" essays, our Members and Columnists candidly share their own unique view of the world. This is a platform from which individual officers can share their own personal insights on issues confronting cops today, as well as opinions, observations, and advice on living life behind the thin blue line. This week's feature is from PoliceOne Member Jim Fuda, a 33+ year veteran Police Officer who recently retired from the King County Sheriff's Office in Seattle. During the last 15 years of his Police career, Jim served in Special Operations where he commanded such Units as K-9, Marine/Dive Unit, the Hostage Negotiations Team, Search & Rescue, Dignitary Protection, and Honor Guard. Do you want to share your own perspective with other P1 Members? Send us an [e-mail](#) with your story.



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By Jim Fuda

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The world observed in horror the Mumbai attacks on November 26th of last year that left 151 dead and more than 325 wounded. Ten gunmen approached the city by watercraft and terrorized a nation, hitting multiple locations as they targeted US and UK passport holders, but killing any innocent person who crossed their path. The Pakistani terrorists crippled the infrastructure of India's most populous city and held Police and Military personnel at bay for more than three days in what would be India's worst terrorist attack since the 1993 coordinated attacks on the stock exchange, government buildings, and businesses where 257 were killed and over 700 wounded.

As I observed the Mumbai attacks in real time, I wondered how an incident such as this — several attacks in a major city or, worse yet, several attacks in multiple cities — might play out in United States. My first reaction was somewhat comforting, realizing that the U.S. is better-trained, has better equipment, and most likely better tactics to countermand this type of attack. I then realized, even if the aforementioned were true, would we be better able to 1) overcome such force in a timelier manner in such crises and 2) would we be better at saving lives?

I took a hard look at what US resources would be at our disposal to react to such an incident(s), and we are, without a doubt, second to none in this regard. However, having the resources, manpower, and weaponry is simply not enough to "get the job done" so to speak. Bureaucracy alone would cause critical delays in response, not to mention key elements such as SWAT Teams would not be in place and/or not all SWAT members on duty at the same time, to immediately and cohesively respond to such a catastrophic event.

Let's take a look at India's structure in the security arena. There were two agencies that responded to these multiple incidents in Mumbai: the Mumbai Police and the military. That's it!

A two-tiered layer of government in India responded and eventually resolved the Mumbai incident. Now imagine this occurring in the United States. Speaking for the Seattle area, and having been through the World Trade Organization riots in 1999 where multiple agencies responded to resolve that situation, it's my belief that a multiple location event with multiple suspects and casualties — with threats still active — would present a huge obstacle to the region. Why is this so? I can think of a multitude of reasons, but let's first consider some basic fundamental differences between a U.S. response and that of India:

- Rules of engagement: Would our culture make it more difficult to engage suspects? Remember, in 3rd world countries, as with the US military in times of war, plans are made and carried out with an "acceptable loss" factor figured into the battle. With US Police, there are NO acceptable losses, so tactics that involve too much risk to the Police and innocent citizens would not be considered. Most police agencies have a "Force Plus One" policy, which simply means an Officer can use that force which is necessary to overcome force used against him. Maybe this wouldn't be an issue in an incident of this magnitude, but definitely describes the mindset of U.S. police going into the battle.
- Tiered layer of government: I already stated that India went into their incident with only two layers of police response — the civilian police force and the military. Imagine what the response would be from the US side of the equation. With City, County, State, and Federal agencies responding, it's not hard to imagine the political response and actions involved. Who would actually be "in charge" and how long would it take to make decisions, let alone having tactics and plans carried out.
- Multiple jurisdictions would be necessary to resolve the event: As stated above, many agencies would need to be involved in the command, tactics, and resolution phases of an event of this type. I can already say that joint training involving scenarios of this type are almost non-existent between policing agencies and definitely do not happen between civilian authorities and the military. With that said, even with planned special events such as the G8 Summit and the like, planning among and between agencies takes as much as a year prior to the event. Many aspects go into the planning and execution of a major event and, even then, jurisdictional problems still arise. Imagine what would occur between agencies at the time of crisis if a Mumbai-type incident were to occur — when minutes of hesitation mean more lives lost. I can also say, in the first few hours of the event, fate would play a major role on how many lives are saved or lost. Much will depend on the number of patrol officers that are already working and able to respond, the availability of SWAT/BDU Teams, and heroic acts by on-duty police personnel and civilians who attempt to intervene prior to police/military intervention.
- Timeliness of Command, Control, & Tactics decision making and deployment of resources: With a multi-agency response, it will be extremely difficult to take command and deploy specially trained units to respond to this type of incident. Intelligence will be a key in making

these critical decisions. However, information, especially in the beginning, will be “sketchy” at best. Hopefully, ICS/NIMS will be implemented immediately after realizing the scope of the event and resources will be responding as intelligence unfolds, giving decision-makers a blueprint as to what will be needed to resolve the incident. To commanders faced with an incident like this, I would add “territorial arrogance will hurt you every time”. In other words, don’t make the error of believing your agency will always have enough resources available to manage every possible incident that comes your way. Incidents constantly change and you may simply deplete your agency’s manpower if the scope of the event should suddenly take a turn. Make sure that whoever and whatever agency volunteers to help, have them respond, even if it’s just to have the extra resources available to you should you need more manpower and weaponry.

### **Mumbai’s Challenges**

I can only begin to imagine the problems faced initially by the Mumbai Police. It wasn’t until well into the incident was it realized the terrorists were using different tactics in different locations. There were, however, summations made by the Police early on:

1. Gunmen had hit several targets at the same time, but it took several hours to realize just how many locations were involved.
2. The terrorists were assaulting “soft” targets such as hotels and restaurants.
3. The suspects were indiscriminately killing random citizens, but realized the focus was on Western targets.

Two types of assault tactics were used by the terrorists: The first was a “Hit and Run” strategy that fired on large groups, retreated from security forces, and then moved on to other targets. The second strategy was a “Seize and Hold” effort by which hostages were taken and strongholds were established. They then barricaded themselves to defend against the police and military.

Once again, imagine how difficult a multiple-location multiple-strategy assault would be in any urban area of the United States. And imagine what resources would be needed, where and what agencies you would secure, how you would manage them, and where you would have them respond. You can easily understand what a complex problem this would quickly become.

### **Questions to Ask**

- Has your agency completed a risk assessment of your area?
- Has your agency established a relationship with your surrounding jurisdictions that would assist in a crisis like this and have you trained together?
- Does your agency have written agreements — Memos of Understanding — with those agencies as to what assistance they can provide?
- Has your media relations personnel established contact with the local media? Remember, the media will be invaluable in these times to relay safety information to citizens.
- Does your agency know the capabilities of the military in your area and realize their response times once the order has been given for them to deploy?
- Has your agency pre-planned staging areas in your community that allow for free movement of personnel?

There are dozens of questions that should be asked and resolved prior to any major incident, but the above are some basic ones that your agency should already have in place.

The United States has the best trained, best prepared, and most professional resources available to respond and resolve such an incident. I do, however, believe that First Responders will set the tone in the first few minutes of a major incident. How these men and women come to realize the impending threat as it unfolds, how they respond to those threats, how they report back to authorities what is occurring in “real” time, and how government then reacts will make the difference in lives saved or lives lost.

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