



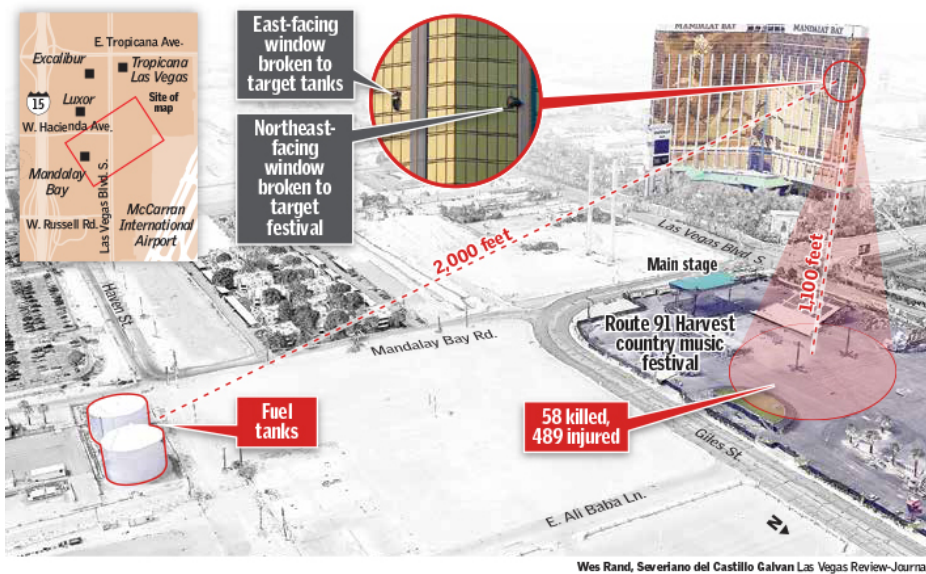
...a world of solutions within reach.

## ACTIVE SHOOTING INCIDENT:

### Again the Worst Nightmare.

Autor: David Crevillén C. - GrupoDC Solutions

Beatriz Gutiérrez, Phd, Terrorism Research Area



Even though there are still many unclear details that will be only uncovered when police investigation finishes, Stephen Paddock won the prize of perpetrating the most lethal active shooting incident in the History of the United States, even ahead of Omar Mateen, the active shooter terrorist in Orlando Pulse nightclub. The attack, which took place late at night on Sunday October, 1<sup>st</sup>,

in Las Vegas, had a toll of more than 58 casualties and over 500 injured victims. The numbers could be much worse, considering the fact that the target was an outdoor country music festival with around 22.000 concertgoers.

Some of the obvious remaining questions are connected to the very nature of the attack. Was it a terrorist act? Or just a more sophisticated shooting rampage? From the beginning, we could exclude mental issues as an amok syndrome case, due to the sophistication and underlying planning showed in the attack. That leaves us two options: a non-terrorist lone wolf or a terrorist lone wolf. In this sense, the key element to differentiate them is not the psychological profile, but the motivation. A

terrorist attack is driven by a political motivation, being this a response against a State considered as an oppressor, the expansion of the Ummah as a religious-political entity or the fight against an occupying power, among other political reasons. This aspect remains unclear. Although along Monday morning the ISIS claimed the attacker as one of its soldiers, apparently nothing in the early stages of the FBI research supported that theory. As it might be, the Islamic State published shortly after through its news agency, Amaq, a second communique stating that Stephen Paddock had converted to Islam in the months before the attack, something that, again, seems to be unnoticed by his relatives and acquaintances. To this extent, it remains unclear the profile of the attacker.

Every intentional attack is performed by someone with a purpose in mind, political or not. It looks for making victims or harming something present in a particular place. It always involves the use of a means of brute force which harms or injures the potential victims. This structure is present in any armed incident, from a robbery to a terrorist attack. If we attend to the attack, we must divide it in two elements, the *modus operandi* and the target. The *modus operandi* could be defined as an active shooting sniping attack: shooting from a high-rise position over a highly populated and defined area in an indiscriminate way; in this sense we would refer to sniping because of the position, and not because of a precision shooting attack. The Las Vegas case have some similarities with the New Orleans sniper, Mark Essex, in 1973, who shot down seven policemen and injured another 13, but in this case the shooter chose carefully white targets, since the motivation of the killing spree was the racial discrimination Essex had suffered as a soldier in the US Navy. In both cases the high-rise position of the attackers hindered the neutralization of the threat, since security forces needed to clear lower floors before finding the shooters. Las Vegas case took less than two hours to be under control, and by then the shooter had committed suicide at the arrival of police agents to his room, taking this measure as scape route. In both cases, the high point from where the shots came gave the attackers the tactical advantage over the victims.

### **Soft targets and the victims.**

Soft targets are defined as civilian-centric spaces dedicated to non-administrative or working activities, from praying to do the shopping, studying or receiving medical treatment. Private-owned, normally they provide a service where customers feel safe. But in many cases, owners and managers prefer providing users with a pleasant experience or service than with a robust security. On the other hand, the perception of threat of these users is low, since their focus is on the activity they are displaying. Both low security measures and low threat awareness are

ingredients to understand why soft targets have become one of the most preferred physical spaces to be targeted by terrorist and non-terrorist attackers. Soft targets are more vulnerable.

Probably this is the case of the Route 91 Harvest country music festival. On Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> night, there were around 22.000 persons in one of the last concerts. It took place on an open area surrounded by high-rise hotels with a clear view of the ground and the entertainment. And the potential victims. If we add these conditions to a carefully implemented attack planning, we have the casualty number present. Las Vegas attack took advantage of the environment, both hotels and concert.

With a motivation still unbeknown, Stephen Paddock chose purportedly a high room in the tower Mandalay hotel, asking specifically for a suite with views to the concert, and he started to accumulate around 27 fire-weapons in his room. Some of them were modified with stock-bump devices to turn them into automatic weapons, and the shooting was carried out using multiple ones. Two rifles with scopes were mounted on tripods in front of the two big windows, which were tampered with a hard tool similar to a hammer. An AR-15 assault rifle type was also found in the room. The selection of weapons induces to think on a pre-planned mass casualty victims attack due to the number of rounds shot per minute with these kind of weapons and the open, uncover location of the potential victims.

The victims, gathered in the concert venue, started to receive at least three bursts of rapid fire from an unknown location, adding to the panic situation of being shot the uncertainty of running away in an undetermined direction since the origin of the threat is unknown. A collateral effect of the shooting were the tangles of people and stampedes, adding a number of injured to the victims accounts.

### **Prevention and management.**

Since 9/11 multiple facilities have improved their security systems adding concentric rings of security, cameras, or more private security agents. But the effect of target hardening is far from being complete, especially in a context of open soft-targets, where protection of the physical space is almost like stemming the tide and strengthened security measures may disrupt users safe performance of the activity they are developing, from praying in a worship house to walking with children in a park on a Sunday morning.

Human factors are especially important in context where metal detectors and bag checks are not available or at least not desirable. Detection of an individual

accumulating an arsenal of automatic weapons in a hotel should have been based in this human attention. But for developing these skills training is mandatory, not only for security staff, but for everybody else in the organizations. As frequently happens, security is reactive, and a matter of owners and managers will for investment in the protection and safety of their customers.

Regarding the management of the incident, the response gap or time between the beginning of the attack until first responders arrive to the location of the incident took 11 minutes, but from the moment the first officers arrived to the hotel until the moment they could access to the room in floor 32, almost one hour and a half elapsed, an increased timing undoubtedly due to the specifics of the building: a high rise tower with multiple guest to secure. The shooting, on the other hand, took less than eleven minutes, but the place couldn't be cleared until the body of Paddock was discovered inside his suite<sup>ii</sup>.

At the street level a different tragedy was taking place, first because the threat wasn't officially neutralized, second because of the high number of concertgoers and between them, the high number of victims, both dead and injured. Triage and decision-taking on the spot about which red-tagged severely wounded had to be evacuated first are the common pattern in this kind of scenarios. And again, a lack: the extremely marginal role of civilians in assisting victims. During the response gap, those moments before the medical emergencies arrived the key role of assistance falls upon the shoulders of bystanders. But to do that a proper training is mandatory, and that is not only managers and owners responsibility, but a public administration one of providing citizens to protect their physical security by themselves.

But in the aftermath of the worst mass shooting attack in the history of the United States, it is not time for critics but for crying our beloved ones and learned one more time from the failures, committed with improving our prevention and management planning in order to create a more secure society. Because security is our responsibility as citizens.

---

(I) Elements of the Trinity of Violence, coined by Louis Klarevas. Klarevas, L. (2016), Rampage Nation. Securing America from Mass Shootings, Prometheus Books, New York. Pp. 27-29.

(II) Wednesday, October 4th, LVMPD briefing. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oSnu1HdXZ7k>