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# Mumbai attacks leave NYPD blues

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MUMBAI - Lights twinkled in the early winter night above the Queen's Necklace, the stretch of Marine Drive ringing the Arabian Sea bay, as the Oberoi-Trident and the Taj Mahal hotels officially reopened at 7 pm on Sunday evening. The move to reopen was an unmistakable announcement that Mumbai is officially back in business after the November 26 terrorist attack.

"We can be hurt, but can't be knocked out," Ratan Tata, chairman of the Tata Group that owns the iconic Taj Mahal, said at the ceremony to reopen the hotel that accommodated the most exclusive glitterati of the 20th century. This was before seaborne terrorists burst through its glass doors to unleash a maelstrom of mass murder that claimed nearly 200 lives.

The Taj Mahal and Oberoi-Trident, two of Mumbai's leading luxury hotels, were the epicenters of a 60-hour siege in the world's most outrageous urban terrorist attack since the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.

The reopening of the two establishments drew a cathartic emotional response across a troubled, angry nation. "Mumbai's 'twin towers' rise again after terror attack," ran the headline in the usually staid south Indian daily The Hindu.

On the night of the terrorist attack, Schubert Vaz, a pianist at the Oberoi-Trident, was playing in the lobby, as he had for 20 years, when two terrorists came through the doors throwing grenades and firing randomly from AK-47 machine guns.

"They showed little emotion, not even angry shouting, as they killed people one by one," Vaz told Asia Times Online. "They just went about methodically shooting at close range. Their cold-bloodedness was the most chilling part." A senior hotel manager helped Vaz escape.



The domes of the Taj Mahal hotel and the historic Gateway of India (L) are seen in front of the Arabian Sea in Mumbai December 22, 2008. The hotel, which was attacked by armed militants last month, reopened its tower section on Sunday.



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Three days later, on November 29, those entering the lobby of the newly freed Trident-Oberoi were overwhelmed with the stench of death and sight of bodies so bloated that clothes had burst at the seams. There were dried pools of blood, bullet shells and glass shards in the badly mutilated Tiffin restaurant, a venue generally more famous for its Japanese cuisine.

"The most shocking sight was of the tables, which still had half-eaten food on plates," said an eyewitness. "It was as if the guests had left the tables for something and would be back to finish their meals."

When diners did return, on December 21, they received instead an after-dinner bill, a white card that simply read, "Thank you for your support."

The Oberoi-Trident opened its doors on Sunday morning to the fragrance of rose petals and soothing sounds of multi-faith prayers. The lobby had been redecorated since it was last opened to the public - only to be filled with explosions, gunfire and the screams of the dying.

In the evening, a small group of policemen, private guards, dark-suited managers and onlookers stood outside the Trident's entrance overlooking the Arabian Sea.

Inside, the new lobby had its old look but was without the seasonal Christmas tree. The lobby tea shop, now holding memories of lost friends, was full but voices were subdued. A guest presented the reception staff with a one kilogram package of chocolate eclairs as a welcoming executive in a sari stood smiling near the lotus-filled pool.

While strolling through the adjacent shopping arcade corridor, the predominant thought was of utter disbelief; how could any mind be so demented as to walk into a peaceful scene such as this and open fire with automatic weapons and grenades.

To help crack the more mysterious aspects to the tragedy, a three-member team of New York Police Department (NYPD) investigators visited Mumbai last week. They shared their discoveries when they returned in a teleconference with senior security officials and business leaders gathered at NYPD headquarters.

"New York has not suffered another terror attack since 9/11, but that does not mean terrorist groups have stopped plotting against large metropolitan cities," Paul Browne, the NYPD deputy commissioner for public information, told the media.

Browne, a stocky, bearded, bespectacled native of the Bronx and a former reporter of the New York Daily Times, has led NYPD investigators into terrorist-hit cities such as Moscow, London, Madrid and Amman. He pointed to many similarities between New York and Mumbai, namely that both are financial capitals of their respective countries and cosmopolitan cities with long coastlines. He also noted that both have extensive commuter train networks, and are high on terrorist target lists. Now each has its own defining traumatic terrorist attack - 9/11 and 11/26.

The most pertinent effect of 9/11 was the planning and hard work the NYPD invested in turning itself into the world's premier police force in counter-terrorism. Mumbai, victim of 11 major terrorist attacks since 1993, and the world's other major cities can learn much from New York's finest.

In 2002, NYPD commissioner Raymond W Kelly created the Counter-terrorism Bureau, the first of its kind. Kelly felt that New York City could not rely solely on the federal government for its defense. The wisdom of this was proved in India when Mumbai lost eight valuable hours after the terrorists struck at 9:30 pm, before the local government received 200 National Security Group commandos based near New Delhi, and the navy deployed marine commandos. The delay caused more victims to be killed and allowed the terrorists to fortify their defenses.

India's Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram announced on December 11 a decision to establish National Security Group commando units in metropolitan cities, a move to emulate the NYPD's decision that it would become the primary anti-terrorism force for New York. The NYPD's counter-terrorism tactics start at street level with uniformed "counter-terrorism executives" leading teams backed with investigators and supervisors.

The Mumbai police started their Anti-Terrorism Squad in 2004. The formation came with a five-point goal:

- To get information about anti-national elements in Maharashtra, the state of which Mumbai is capital.
- To co-ordinate with central information agencies like the Intelligence Bureau, the Research and Analysis Wing.
- To co-ordinate with similar agencies of other states.
- To track and eliminate activities of crime syndicates.
- To detect rackets of counterfeit currency notes and the smuggling of narcotic substances. ??

In contrast, the NYPD Counter-terrorism Bureau draws from a detailed organizational structure, with primary support coming from its Counter-terrorism Division led by deputy chief Joseph McKeever. The Counter-terrorism Division is further divided into multiple sub-units:

- The Technology and Construction Section that designs and implements large-scale but localized counter-terrorism projects such as the Lower Manhattan Security Initiative and Operation Sentinel.
- The Training Section giving counter-terrorism training to NYPD patrols, other law enforcement agencies and the private sector.
- The Threat Reduction Infrastructure Protection Section (TRIPS) that identifies and protects critical city infrastructure sites.
- The Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear and Explosives (CBRNE) Section.
- The Maritime Team for harbor security.??

"We still do not have any crisis management system," said Tata Group chairman Ratan Tata to the media after security forces allowed him to enter his Taj Mahal hotel on November 29, after 60 hours of confusion and lack of co-ordination from local authorities. ?The 70-year old Tata, possibly India's most respected industrialist, is becoming the face and voice of a city frustrated at the absence of a quick, effective response to a terrorist attack even after 11 previous strikes in Mumbai. The first was 15 years ago, when serial bomb blasts on March 12, 1993, killed 250 and injured over 700. ??

After all this time, Mumbai still lacks a coordinated crisis management system - despite frantic talks about it after every crisis. After 9/11, the NYPD Counter-terrorism Bureau established its Emergency Preparedness and Exercise Section that co-ordinates with the Office of Emergency Management that was first formed in 1996. ??

Possibly the greatest failing of the Mumbai police is not working closely with leading corporate groups and business establishments. After helplessly watching terrorists overrun and burn his flagship hotel for three nights, Ratan Tata publicly declared on December 16 that his Tata Group would no longer depend on local police for its security and would establish its own anti-terrorism measures. ??

In contrast to Mumbai law enforcement, the NYPD closely works with the New York corporate sector through a separate department called the NYPD Shield Unit. This oversees anti-terrorist training and information-sharing with private companies. In effect, thousands of business establishments, including those online, become eyes and ears of the NYPD. ??

Operation Nexus of the Shield Unit, for instance, runs a nationwide network of over 25,000 firms that have signed up for this project in which NYPD detectives train them to alert authorities of any suspicious purchase or trading activity. ??

Similarly, the Lower Manhattan Security Initiative secures key financial properties such as the New York Stock Exchange and the headquarters of leading companies and financial institutions in Lower Manhattan. Both the Bombay Stock Exchange and Air India headquarters in Mumbai were victims of the 1993 bomb blasts in south Mumbai - the elite business and residential area that was also a target in the November 26 terrorist strike. Mumbai could do with a south Mumbai security initiative. ??NYPD commissioner Raymond Kelly could have been speaking for India and Mumbai - as well as coastal cities such as Hong Kong and Sydney - when he said, "One of the stated aims of the terrorists is to attack America's economy. Nothing represents the nation's financial and commercial strength more than New York and the world-class companies that call it home." ??

Mumbai police wielding bamboo sticks - called *lathis* and World War II-era rifles were tragically outmatched by terrorists brandishing AK-47s on November 26. In contrast, the NYPD has a massive counter-terrorism deployment force, including Hercules and Transit Operational Response Canine Heavy Weapons and emergency service unit teams with heavy weapons. ??

But the key difference between the NYPD and the Mumbai police is political skullduggery which in the past two decades has communalized, corrupted and politicized the Mumbai police force that was once called the "Scotland Yard of the East". The Mumbai police first began as a police outpost when the Portuguese owned the fishing islands of Bombay in 1661. Gerald Aungier, who became governor after the East India Company purchased Bombay in 1669, is credited as creator of the original force. ??

Nearly 340 years later, it's common public knowledge that various Mumbai police postings are "auctioned" by politicians to the highest bidder who then makes good his "investment" through corruption and underworld links. ??

Mumbai still does not seem to have learned its lesson - even after the November 26 tragedy that has hurt the city like no other terrorist attack before. Two weeks after 16 police officers and constables died while lacking basic weapons and effective bullet-proof vests, the municipality is paying for over two dozen city officials to attend a junket to Thailand for a more important necessity - to study Bangkok zoo.

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