

TARGET HARDENING FOR LAW ENFORCEMENT • ACTIVE SHOOTER INCIDENT COMMAND • RECCE OPS • HEAD IN THE SAND

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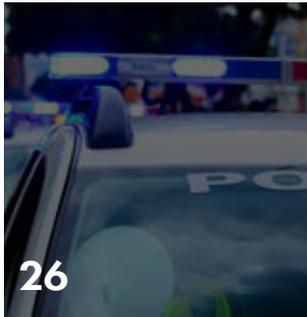
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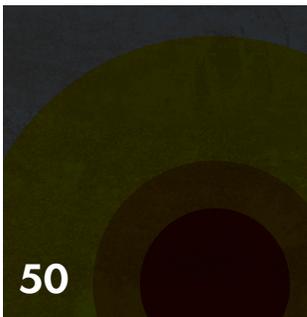
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RECONNAISSANCE OPERATIONS

by Orlando Wilson

I wrote this a few years ago while training a security force from a West African Government who was active in counter terrorist operations. I was taught and employed covert reconnaissance (recce) while in the British Army over 20 years ago in numerous environments.

Since then I have taught and employed it while operating commercially in Europe, Latin America and Africa.

Personally from what I have seen over the years recce training and operations are often neglected, I think because people would sooner focus on more exciting “direct action” training and operations. But without recce operations, accurate intelligence and proper pre-planning “direct action” operation usually fail.

RECCE OPERATIONS

Reconnaissance (recce) operations are a necessity in all tactical operations as they provide pre-operations intelligence on locations, terrorists and can verify or deny a local source’s information.

All recce operations need to be done covertly, the terrorists/criminals should not know you’re in their area or what you are doing. Recce operations in hostile areas should be done in plain clothes and civilian vehicles, you need to blend in

with the environment and population. Nothing tactical should be carried and if armed try to go with no government issue weapons. When I was working with vigilantes in West Africa in 2012 we detained a guy who we had spotted watching and following us while on a regular patrol. He was from a cultist gang and the clear give away he was a criminal doing surveillance on us was that he had nothing on him; no money, no ID, no phone, nothing; Just the clothes

Pfc. Anthony Quinn, an M240B gunner and Eaglewood, Fla., native with Troop A, 1st Squadron, 1st Cavalry Regiment, 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division, waits to conduct training on dismounted patrol and reconnaissance operations during the Network Integration Evaluation 13.1 at Doña Ana Range Complex, N.M., Oct. 16, 2012. Photo by: Sgt. Jonathan Thomas

he was wearing. I take it he had the misconception the vigilantes would have stolen his possessions... Moral of the story, when trying to blend in with the local population don't overdo it or under do it!

Things that could need to be recce'd include areas for arrest operations, terrorist/criminal safe houses, camps, meeting locations, routes, ambush locations etc. in urban and rural areas.

For example, if recceing an area for an arrest operation some of the things to be considered would be:

1. Approaches
2. Team drop off locations
3. Team's surveillance / cut off / snatch team positions
4. Communications dead spots
5. Vehicle and pedestrian traffic
6. Any terrorist/criminal surveillance or security in the area
7. Friendliness of civilians to the terrorists/criminals; would they intervene to protect them
8. Safe arcs of fire and no fire areas
9. Any CCTV that is in the area
10. Escape and exfiltration routes

Some things to consider if conducting a close target recce on a terrorist/criminal safe house could include:

1. Approaches
2. Surveillance and remote camera locations
3. Communications dead spots
4. Routes for walk by recce's
5. Terrorist/criminal surveillance and security
6. Lines of communications to the safe house
7. Any visible security or defensive measures
8. Any vacant buildings in the area
9. What vehicles are in or near the safe house
10. Does the building have electricity, if yes what's the source?

11. Where are the phone lines and is there Wi-Fi?
12. Where are the water sources and supplies?
13. Does the building have air conditioning?
14. What type of roof does the building have and can you access it?
15. How could you enter the building?
16. Types of doors and windows?
17. Form up positions for an attack team and cut off positions
18. Possible terrorist escape routes from the building and area
19. If terrorists are seen are they armed, how are they dressed and are they alert?
20. Etc.

Maximum use should be made of video and stills cameras on all recce operations, these days with cameras in cell phones there is no excuse for not getting good video and photos. Video and photos should always be analyzed after the operation as they could have picked up an important detail that you had initially missed. Pictures speak a thousand words so get good video and photos!

You have two ways of conducting physical recce operations; static observation posts (OP) and close target reconnaissance (CTR). An OP operation would usually take the form of an operative taking a position in a vehicle, covert hide or even a café and watching a location or area. These days this usually includes the use of monitored or unmonitored surveillance cameras. Over the last decade unmanned aerial drones have been used effectively for intelligence gathering and direct action operations. As technology develops and prices fall drones should be an option in all recce operations.

CTR operations take the form of operatives walking or driving past a location and getting as much information

as possible on each pass or infiltrating a terrorist/criminal location. You must be careful not to use the same vehicles or operatives to often on CTR's as they could be compromised. All operatives should have a believable and checkable cover story for being in the area, how detailed you go depends on the operation. Very few operations are perfect and you need to get the most information possible without compromising the operatives and potential future operations.

The basic principles of recce operations apply to both urban and rural areas. In say a rural environment a static observation location could take the form of a camouflaged OP in a ditch, a bush or dug underground etc. Where as in an urban environment a derelict building, roof top or garbage skip/area could provide you with a concealed observation position.

OBSERVATION POST OPERATIONS

Covert observation posts (OP's) can be put in place for a few hours or a few weeks. Operatives conducting OP's need to be very self-disciplined, be able to keep quiet, handle extreme boredom and very uncomfortable conditions for extended periods of time. The general size of the OP team would depend on the task; usually they are between two to four operatives.

The equipment required for the OP would depend on the environment and the length of the operation. Once in position the OP team would keep their noise and movement to a minimum, so that will mean they will need to carry in with them everything they need for the operation; food, water, communications and spare batteries etc. In hostile areas re-supply can be risky but on extended operations it will be needed, generally supplies will be dropped off and picked up a distance away from the OP.

On OP operations over 24 hours' team members would need to work out a rotation system for who is observing and who is resting, one operative would need to be awake at all times. If there is limited cover the OP can be split with an observation and supporting location, if the operatives are moving between both, extreme care needs to be taken not to be spotted. Operatives need to be dressed, armed, with important equipment packed and at hand at all times. If the OP is compromised the team would need to flee the location, they will not be equipped or have the strength in numbers to engage a large terrorist/criminal force in a firefight.

To avoid detection an OP needs to be perfectly camouflaged using such things as scrim netting and in a rural environment local foliage. Any foliage used needs to be replaced regularly as dead foliage would give away the OP position. Noise must be kept to a minimum, even a poncho providing overhead cover can make noise that's unfamiliar in the bush and can alert locals to your presence. Another potential problem are smells coming from the OP team such as body waste and food, which will usually be eaten cold due to the smell from cooking and the weight of cooking equipment. Body waste would need to be stored in airtight plastic bags, bottles and carried away with the team when they leave the position. The OP team cannot leave any ground sign of their presence as it can jeopardize any future operations.

OP's can be for logging and reporting or reactionary purposes. A logging and reporting OP will do nothing but gather intelligence on a target. A reactionary OP can call in direct action forces or perform direct action operation themselves. It all depends on the task at hand and the resources available.

When working in West Africa in late 2012 we deployed logging and reporting

Very few operations are perfect and you need to get the most information possible without compromising the operatives and potential future operations.

OP's into suspected cultist and criminal areas to initially determine the extent of illegal activity, the terrorist/criminal routes and meeting locations etc. In Latin America while working with tactical police units we have had operatives go undercover as beggars in high crime urban areas on reactionary tasking while surveilling narco and whore houses. The basic rule is there are no rules, use your imagination and remember that flexibility of action is essential for all counter terrorist/criminal operations.

CLOSE TARGET RECCE OPERATIONS

Close target recce (CTR) operations are extremely important and supplies the intelligence that is the basis for all successful direct action operations.



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. David Pena, left, Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Yaudas, center and Capt. Sean Tennimon, conduct reconnaissance operations in the Abu T'shir community of the Rashid district in southern Baghdad, Iraq, Jan. 28, 2009. Photo by: Sgt. 1st Class Brent Williams

CTR's are where operatives will get close to or infiltrate a target area or compound to gain real time intelligence. This requires the CTR operators to be extremely stealthy and devious to be able to get close to the terrorist/criminal locations without being detected and compromised. If they are making an undercover overt penetration they must have believable cover stories, look the part and be able to speak the local accents etc.

The size of a CTR team will depend on the task. Our usual CTR team is

two operatives with others in a support position. I will advise the use of two operatives for a CTR team as they can move a lot more stealthily than a large team and can assist each other in an emergency. In a lot of situations it is a lot more effective for a lone operative to get close to or infiltrate a targeted location, it goes without saying that the operative should be trained and experienced!

The equipment carried by the CTR team should be minimal, their job is to gather information, not to get into fights.

Everything carried by the CTR operatives must be able to be accounted for in a cover story. Items such as voice recorders, high end communications equipment and cameras will immediately draw suspicion of security forces and terrorists/criminals alike if the operatives are searched. In many places high end equipment will just end up being stolen by corrupt security forces if it doesn't get you detained, which can cost you money and heighten the risk of compromising operations!

CTR operatives need to travel as light as possible and be able to move cautiously and quickly, if compromised by the terrorists/criminals they would exit the area with maximum speed and not engage the enemy. If pushed to action they must be able to end confrontations quickly and efficiently without civilian casualties, which can be detrimental to future operations.

Over the years we have worked with teams employing CTR's on meetings in 5 star hotels, rural safe houses and numerous urban and rural terrorist/criminal locations. Commercially we have employed CTR's in Eastern Europe on suspected locations of counterfeiting operations, in Central America while working with police tactical teams we conducted the successful infiltration of whore houses looking for drug activity, human trafficking of underage sex workers and gathering intelligence for future raids. When working with vigilantes in West Africa the main targets for recce's and infiltrations were drug houses, kidnapper's locations in the bush, and when raids were organized the politics started, but such is Africa!

Where time, manpower and the situation allows several CTR's should be run on a location by separate teams to ensure the operatives are seeing the same things. Inexperienced operatives can over exaggerate what they saw because they

are nervous or they want to impress the operations commanders. Facts need to be reported, not suspicions, opinions or predictions. Operational security must be understood by everyone involved, nothing about operations should be discussed with anyone not directly involved; lose lips do sinks ships.

The basic recce principles apply to all situations but the core requirement is having disciplined and well trained recce teams. Recce operations are essential and are required to ensure successful direct action operations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Since leaving the British army in 1993, Mr. Wilson has worked in South and West Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, U.S., Middle East, Latin America and Caribbean and co-ordinate projects in

many other countries. His experience has ranged from providing close protection / bodyguard services for Middle Eastern Royal families and varied corporate clients, kidnap and ransom services, corporate intelligence, para-military training for private individuals and tactical police units and government agencies.

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