

**Rupert Godesen suggests that a new approach is required for hostile environment training and that sometimes, it's the simple things that can really make the difference**

# IT'S NOT ALL GUN

**T**here's no doubt about it, hostile environment training is on the tip of everyone's tongues these days. What was once the preserve of journalists, contractors working in oil and gas and other intrepid souls is fast becoming more and more relevant to (and sought after by) business travellers venturing overseas. But hasn't travelling overseas beyond the reach of public services that we take for granted at home always been slightly dangerous and risky?

Yes of course it has (depending on where you go and what you do), but some commentators would claim that there's been an element of sleepwalking into the global security situation that we now find ourselves in today. We've been able to move freely across the world relatively safely for some time, politics is just something that happens to other people, it's got nothing to do with us. Our Government representatives and the myriad of security companies that have dozen-strong teams of young, tech-savvy, graduate analysts constantly monitoring social media and the press, don't have crystal balls to predict what's going to happen next in order to protect their citizens/customers.

The average business traveller has been slow to wake up to the reality that people today need to know how to carry out a rolling risk assessment, carry and fit a CAT tourniquet, a pressure dressing and know what to do if/when trouble comes their way, be that an express kidnap attempt, carjacking or a roaming gunman in a train station. With a few notable exceptions, the normal order of things (relative to today) has been maintained for the last few decades. You might even say for a generation. Technology, globalisation, smart phones, the internet and advancement in medicine have steadily and inexorably pushed back religion (and those who practice and take guidance from it) into the margins. But it appears that religion is starting to push back. The elephant in the room may very well be that this is only the beginning and that it'll get a whole lot worse.

During the heyday of the Provisional IRA, citizens of the UK just got used to a certain level of terrorism, risk and death and to a certain extent this continues today. The world is changing all the time as borders are blurred, violence occurs in corners of the world that were once tranquil and prosperous. Migrants are on the move for work, a better life, security and for a tiny minority (we hope) to spread chaos, murder and panic. But the changes don't stop there, we're no longer as wealthy as we were after the global economic crash. Few companies have got the time or the funds to release their staff for an off-the-peg six-day course to learn about the importance of being prepared for the foreign environment that they're about to work in.

Having started my own training company five years



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ago to train people the way I like to learn, I spoke to my very first client about the details, itinerary and length of the course that he required for his staff and the response was rather worrying. "How quickly can you hit the key learning points and have them back at their desks?" he asked.

Time is money and clients want to as much value for it as they can, while at the same time making sure that the training is doing what is legally required. We're all having to adapt and overcome. Investors in training want to know what their staff are going to learn. They might want to drop a specific module, and add another

***People on a training course are hooded and given an idea of the experience of being kidnapped***

# NS AND VIOLENCE



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to make sure that it fits with their unique demands. Emphasis may be on lone female traveller safety, cyber use for travellers or how to correctly use an interpreter. To convince people to send their staff to you for an important period of training, you need to have credibility, pedigree, references and a flexible approach to the venue and costs. The customer is not the king, he's the emperor and each day there are more and more SME's popping up selling training and expertise.

In the good old days, a career in the Forces would have been enough to convince a client that you knew what you were talking about and that they were safe in your hands. But today's clients are smarter and have more complex and specific demands.

I recently ran a course for a client in Sweden, a documentary filmmaker whose teams go all over the world documenting life in some very tough places. Half way through the first morning something wasn't quite right. I felt that there was something the group wanted to say to me so I called a halt to proceedings and got everyone together. I asked if everything was okay and if they were happy with the programme and what we'd looked at so far. "It's quite different from what we've been taught in the past," said one. "Are we going to be doing heli-handling, shooting and unarmed combat?" asked another.

I felt a little deflated initially because my ideas for the training must have appeared terribly boring to them. Were they expecting to learn a combination of unarmed combat, the basics of Krav Maga and Jason Bourne's Treadstone training squeezed into two days? Had I got it that badly wrong? I took a deep breath and pointed out to the assembled 14-strong team that I thought the time we had together would be better spent learning how to carry out valuable research on their destination, helping them do their admin, checking that everyone had taken a medical. Looking at how to carry out a Risk Assessment and using it as a tool for planning etc...

"Then and only then" I said, "once we've done all that boring but important stuff, we'll get half the team to dress up in smocks and balaclavas, armed with airsoft weapons and go through some fun scenarios and learn how to successfully negotiate road blocks, check points and other vulnerable points".

Their silence was followed by a wave of relief that swept through the room and there was a huge collective "Phew!" I took this as a green light and cracked on with the training. Later talking to them individually I learnt what the previous provider had taught them, and it was all pretty irrelevant.

In my opinion, when it comes to training and scenarios, many make the mistake of going straight for the 'murder, death, kill' scenario far too quickly. "You arrive at your destination, get into a cab and

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BOOOOM!! You've been snatched, what are you going to do?" It's the way a lot of military training is carried out, for exercise purposes. But there are more songs on iTunes today than there are things that can happen to mess up your day, slow you down, interrupt business activity and generally inconvenience you before we even consider the threat of terrorism and kidnap and ransom. And most of them are just bloody irritating.

In reality you're much more likely to be badly hurt in a car crash than be shot or kidnapped. In the US in 2015, more people were killed by toddlers with firearms than by terrorists.

As a starting point it's also important to indulge in a moment of self-reflection and think about the client's personality – could this also be something that could put them at risk? Some of us are reckless, arrogant, conceited, gullible and people pleasers. Others are too trusting, over cautious, timid, generous, bigoted, short tempered and juvenile. These characteristics can all have an impact on any given situation.

HEAT, PSAT or CONDO training – call it what you will – needs to be always evolving and improving, changing to fit each and every client and scenario. I learn something from the people I work with during almost every single course I run. It's important to realise that a wealth of different experiences are right in front of you and it's vital to learn from them. By way of an example

some years ago I was teaching the BBC World Service in Islamabad. One of the correspondents mentioned to me that in Pakistan they never get into a taxi if it's got an LPG gas bottle in the back. "Why not?" I asked. She replied that in the US and Europe they are all normally kite marked, checked annually, have the right washers etc. In many parts of the world they're fakes and some explode after a shunt or collision burning the passengers to death. Needless to say, I wrote this down along with many golden nuggets that I learned from them and incorporated them into my lessons.

Earth is an untidy, messy, noisy, wonderful hotchpotch mix of languages, cultures, terrains, climates, ideas and faiths. Not to mention the food. We celebrate the differences because they make life so much more interesting and varied for the traveller. It's why we travel after all, isn't it? But with differences, sometimes come opportunities to offend. Some people go out of their way to offend (or be offended) due to their upbringing, prejudices and jealousies. Driven by fear of their own shortcomings, fuelled by arrogance, ignorance or impulse they sometimes lash out at the object of their frustration. We need to encourage our clients, delegates and representatives to walk for five minutes in the shoes of the people who live in the areas that they visit, to tread carefully and to always be looking to improve themselves.



*A cameraman gets hostile environment training from Mexican Army special forces personnel at their military training camp in Temamatla*

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