



# KNOW THE THREAT

**Anthony Tucker-Jones** talks to **Pete Lawrence**, Managing Director of Frontier Risks, about training for hostile zones and the recent chemical attack in Salisbury

**P**ersonal security continues to be a considerable market, thanks to the threats posed globally by criminal activity and international terrorism. Some countries and maritime regions have become particularly hostile environments to work in because of widespread organised crime and sectarian violence. Certainly political and security risk forecasting remains big business. Companies and their insurers – while they have a duty of care – are reliant on risk ratings for a wide range of factors. Key among these are kidnap hotspots and Islamist extremism. One such company that helps prepare people is the UK based Frontier Risks Group.

**ATJ:** Do you feel the nerve agent attack in Salisbury raises the spectre of similar threats to UK nationals overseas?

**PL:** Not necessarily in the short term, but the threat of biological and chemical agents being used in the UK before this happened was probably one of the UK's biggest domestic threats.

**ATJ:** What can be done to mitigate against the risk?

**PL:** Increased funding for our policing and intelligence services alongside our military. All of these are under funded, under resourced and at a tipping point of being ineffective with the austerity measures we have seen take place over the last couple of years. Hopefully this will now start to reverse. Also Increased CBRN testing

capability for our Border Agency would aid these things.

**ATJ:** What's your overall take on the events that took place in Salisbury?

**PL:** There are three scenarios. Firstly, it was a state action backed by Putin, sending a clear message to the West that anyone who crosses him or the Motherland is not safe anywhere in the world, and showing the power of Russia to his people in election year. There are much easier ways of killing someone, by using this relatively unknown nerve agent it also shows the West that you don't know all the capabilities we have.

Secondly, the nerve agent was produced and sourced from Russia and then fell into the wrong hands. Thirdly, there is an unknown party trying to make this act look like the Russian State. One thing is for sure: Putin does not make mistakes, every action is calculated with a clear plan. He doesn't just look at a few moves ahead, he looks at the final move. One of the most powerful leaders in the world, a stable genius some would say.

**ATJ:** Do you feel the Russians are responsible?

**PL:** The Prime Minister said it's "Highly likely" Russia was responsible. The phrase highly likely is language used within the intelligence community to mean 75-85 percent certain. The only level above that is Almost Certain which is 90 percent plus. I am a little shocked at Teresa May's response, you would have thought after the Iraq war, we would ensure that we have every fact before we accuse anyone of anything, especially the big bear that is Russia.

**ATJ:** Clearly the increasing number of failed states and those with weak central governments pose ongoing problems for employers and tourists alike. Tell me about the Frontier Risks Group.

**PL:** The team at FRG are highly experienced security and risk consultants who provide a very broad range of services that includes security and travel risk management. We also provide protective and medical consultancy services.

**ATJ:** How did you get into this industry?

**PL:** My role in the security industry was a natural progression from a seven-year career in the Royal Marines. I got involved during the piracy boom and one of my first jobs was on a superyacht. Then with a colleague I started a company, which we sold to Protection Group International. Eventually I brought it back after they moved into cyber security.

**ATJ:** How did your hostile environment awareness training come about?

**PL:** Our core training is the Security Risk Management Consultants (SRMC) course conducted at the Emergency Planning College in York. Around this we also offer HEAT training and conflict management courses. We have been in the HEAT business for about six years providing training to very diverse clients ranging from TV networks to politicians.

**ATJ:** Can preparing people for different types of hostile zones be tricky?

**PL:** Not necessarily, because it's all about preparation – if people know what to expect and how to react should

the need arise, then they tend to be much more relaxed.

**ATJ:** Is this training just for big business?

**PL:** No because HEAT is suitable for government and non-government organisations, independent groups as well as individuals who are either going on business or simply just want to travel in what may be potentially hostile countries or simply very remote destinations.

**ATJ:** Just how difficult is it preparing for hostile environments?

**PL:** It depends on what is needed and appropriate. Training courses for hostile environments can be up to a week, but typically they are now about two days. We tailor our courses to our clients' needs, offering a variety of packages – it's about being responsive to particular environments as security risks do vary dramatically region to region.

**ATJ:** Your HEAT training is very comprehensive, is it possible to cover everything in just two days?

**PL:** No, but our modules are tailored, so say for example it is an area where there is no threat of kidnapping, there is no need for training on staying alive in captivity. Likewise post-traumatic stress or chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear training may not be necessary.

**OUR INTELLIGENCE SERVICES ARE CLOSE TO BEING INEFFECTIVE DUE TO AUSTERITY MEASURES**

**ATJ:** Are there basic lessons that are applicable across the board?

**PL:** Yes, but it is important to remember that while the fear is often being kidnapped or harmed in some way, you are more likely to be the victim of a road traffic accident or indeed poor medical treatment. It's important to understand where the dangers lay – ultimately they can be the most basic of things. Having an appreciation of cultural issue dos and don'ts is maybe the most basic issue for any traveller.

**ATJ:** You warn that over exposure to risk can create complacency, what can be done to safeguard against this?

**PL:** While some people are aware of potential threats, some can be ignorant, while others can be plain anti-security because they see it as intrusive. In terms of complacency, the best analogy is a dangerous road; at first you take real care crossing, but after a while don't give it a second thought. People do get used to the risk, which is fine but at the same time you need to create a security culture that understands and remains aware of the threat. There are, after all, many types of threat and it is important to be able to prioritise them.

**ATJ:** Just how important are counter and anti-surveillance techniques?

**PL:** Once again a lot depends on the environment.

Essentially such techniques are designed to give people awareness, especially if they are new to an area. Others who have been working somewhere for years often know what to expect, but they can still need briefing on new emergent threats.

**ATJ: In light of the Oxfam and Save the Children scandal, there seems to have been a failure in the safeguarding of those they are supposed to be helping?**

**PL:** I am not really in a position to comment on this, as it's not my area. What I can say is NGOs do

## YOU'RE MORE LIKELY TO BE THE VICTIM OF A TRAFFIC ACCIDENT OR POOR MEDICAL TREATMENT

difficult work in extremely difficult parts of the world, alongside their vast size coupled with working in an arguably unregulated industry makes it almost impossible for things like this never to occur.

**ATJ: I note that you offer chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence (CBRNe) training, how much of a viable risk would you say that this poses?**

**PL:** I would have said generally it isn't, but Salisbury has changed the perception of the threat. It's important to ensure that staff are not at risk of contamination and as you will know there have been concerns for years over the potential of terrorists employing a 'dirty' bomb using radioactive material.

**ATJ: What are the most hostile places to work?**

**PL:** These tend to be the failed states. Many of which have gotten worse in recent years. For example, I was in Yemen eight years ago and it was a very workable environment. However, it is not currently a good place to be because of the civil war – it's simply not safe. There can come a point when the level of risk becomes unacceptable. There are also the usual culprits: Afghanistan, Libya, Somalia and Syria.

**ATJ: Can you see things improving? The list always seems to be getting longer.**

**PL:** Countries do change and stability can return – Sri Lanka had its problems during the civil war but is now fine. Iraq is not too bad and even areas of Somalia are workable, for example the breakaway area of Puntland in the North-East of the country has its own government, police, coastguard so it is not too bad either.

**ATJ: Do you have many horror stories?**

**PL:** In my experience you do sometimes come across a shocking lack of preparation – sometimes it's just plain naivety. It can sometimes be the larger companies that are least prepared, many companies concentrate their focus on the health and safety side and the UK, avoiding security threats elsewhere.

**ATJ: What advice would you offer anyone travelling to a potentially hostile area?**

**PL:** As we've discussed, be prepared, do your homework, but it's also important to keep a sense of proportion. For example, if you relied solely on the news you can get the impression that some countries are complete no-go areas – for example Pakistan – when they quite clearly are not ●

**Pete Lawrence** is

Managing Director of the Frontier Risks Group. He has large-scale project experience delivering end-to-end solutions to clients in East Africa, The Middle East and Asia. Advising FTSE 250 companies, UK and Foreign Government Agencies. His primary objective is now to give strategic oversight and guidance to Frontier Risks Group and its associated companies.

**Anthony Tucker-Jones**

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**Students being briefed on risk mitigation techniques by Pete Lawrence**



Picture credit: Frontier Risks Group