

PREVENTING RANSOMWARE ATTACKS, THE DECISION CYCLE, KILLING WITH KINDNESS

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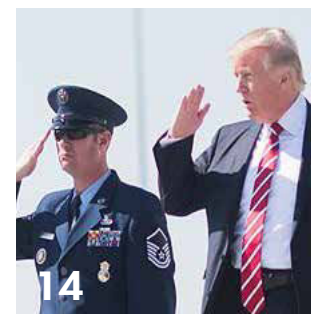
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HOW THEY KILL WITH KINDNESS

By Orlando Wilson

The devil does not come to you with a red face and horns, he comes to you disguised as everything you ever wanted!

When going over threat assessments with security consultants, executive protection personnel, and the like, it amazes me that the vast majority of people only consider and plan for dealing with the threats of physical violence or theft. Their operational plans then usually consist of nothing more than supplying as many armed personnel, armored cars, and house alarms as the budget will allow. However, providing your clients with a serious security program, in my opinion, means you should be proactive and preventative, not simply reactive.

To start with, what people forget is that in most countries it is impossible for foreigners to legally carry firearms for self-defense, and if locals can carry firearms, the laws on use of force are usually very strict; obtaining

the weapons and permits can be very difficult and expensive. More importantly, although armed guards, trained or untrained, can reassure a client and deter your basic street criminal, for professional criminals they are just a show that presents little deterrence.

I tell my clients that I place the threat from blackmail and kidnapping a lot higher than that of assassination. Think about it: If someone is executed, what use are they? None. But if someone can be entrapped, blackmailed and manipulated, they can provide the criminals with an ongoing source of funds, information, etc. If someone is kidnapped, they are a valuable asset that can be ransomed or used as a bargaining tool to influence the decisions of others.

Now, think like a criminal who

U.S. Service members with an anti-terrorism/force protection team examine a suspicious item found during a Task Force Colonist event at Bagram Airfield, Afghanistan, May 30, 2013, Photo by: SSgt Stephenie Wade

“there are many ways to make a protection team operationally ineffective, and the use of force is nowhere near the top of this list.”

is going to kidnap someone who is traveling with armed bodyguards: Would you want to get into a shootout with the bodyguards and risk your life and that of the person you want to kidnap, and alert the police or military, or would you rather do things more discreetly?

“*Plata o plomo*” (Silver or Lead) is a common criminal saying in Latin America, and it means take my money or take my bullets. This is not just a Latin American phenomenon; in the late 90s I had dealings with a guy in Eastern Europe who was tactically and self-defense-wise very capable. He was working for a state police unit protecting a politician who had Mafia issues, as most people with any influence did in those days in that region. The Mafia group’s initial approach to the politician was not directly to him; they first contacted the wives of the bodyguards on his security detail. And, as usual the initial approach was very polite, offering financial rewards for favors...” So, who’s more important to you, a client or your family?”

In the real world, fighting is for amateurs; think about it from the

criminal’s point of view, there are many ways to make a protection team operationally ineffective, and the use of force is nowhere near the top of this list. To start with, most people’s standard of personal security is extremely low. They’re a bodyguard and have a gun, so people are scared of them, right? Well, maybe these bodyguards are impressed with their reflection in the mirror when they are taking selfies in the bathroom wearing their best suit and tie...Most are not up to the task, just watch the documentary on Netflix and quickly agree.

If a “bodyguard” can’t protect them self, how can they protect others? Professional personal security is 24/7, not just for the length of a detail or shift.

In most places in the world drugs are freely available, so why should a criminal need to get into a shootout when they can just drug their target’s security team? It’s common for people to get drugged in bars and clubs for robbery or rape, but many professionals in the security business don’t consider this threat to security details. What would it take for a server at your regular coffee shop to spike your morning latte with Ketamine, GHB, or Rohypnol? I am sure if your threat comes from semiprofessional criminals they will be assessing your routine, and I am sure the barista who is making your morning coffee with a smile will happily take the criminals’ silver rather than lead. A basic Gypsy robbery tactic in Europe is to get their small children to go out and sell glasses of tea or soft drinks to tourists. In some cases this is to make the target

vulnerable when otherwise guarded. Would you expect a little girl to give you a spiked drink?

Always know where your food and drink comes from, always be suspicious of gifts, and never leave food or beverages unattended in public or with strangers, especially attractive women you have just met. The common date rape drugs like Rohypnol, GHB, and ketamine are tasteless and odorless, take effect in approximately 15 to 30 minutes, and usually last three to six hours depending on dosage. These drugs make the victims weak or render them unconscious and unable to remember later what happened. Prescription drugs such as Klonopin and Xanax have similar effects, especially in large doses.

A drug that is regularly used in crimes in Colombia, Venezuela, and Ecuador is Burandanga (scopolamine), which is extracted from the Borrachero tree. Scopolamine has numerous legitimate medical uses, but when used by rapists and criminals, it renders their victims into a compliant zombie-like state of which they remember nothing. Victims have the outward appearance of being okay but are in fact in a trance and are totally unaware of what they’re doing. Victims of scopolamine overdose are common in Colombian hospitals, as are the deaths of those who received a large dose or had a low tolerance. This drug is more common than people think. I have come across similar ones in Haiti and West Africa; once administered through liquid or powder form, the victim is completely compliant and helpless.

In the late 90s in Eastern Europe I knew of one very low-profile government agency that suffered several fatalities from targeted chemical attacks. The initial killings were not recognized as targeted assassination as the victims had died in car crashes. What sparked concern was that during the autopsies the victims, who were otherwise fit and in good physical condition, had fluid in their lungs. They had been killed by an anesthesia drug placed in the ventilation intake of their cars, so when they were running the car’s heating system, the anesthesia was dispersed inside the car, and they died from a chemical overdose combined and covered with a car crash.

In 2002 Russian special forces used

an anesthesia drug to end the hostage crisis at Nord-Ost Theater in Moscow. The drug, Kolokol-1, was pumped into the theater through the ventilation/heating system and knocked out everyone inside; all the terrorists were killed, but unfortunately so were 130 of the hostages, reportedly due to adverse effects from the drug. A much lower-tech version of this would be to spray pepper or OC spray into a building’s ventilation intake; the gas would disperse throughout the building and affect anyone inside if sufficient quantities were used.

One of the best and most effective weapons organized criminals have and use is sex. I remember as a 17-year-old British infantryman first in basic training and then Northern Ireland

being warned that the Irish terrorists used to send women into the bars to pick up (honey trap) soldiers; when the troops went home with these young ladies instead of getting sexual favors they got a beating or a bullet in the head from their awaiting accomplices.

The tactic of the “honey trap” is where, let’s say, a female (although there can be male honey traps) will approach and start a conversation with a male, who may be a preplanned target or just someone who looks like he has money. The aim of the female is to get the male to go with her to a hotel room or apartment for sex. If the male goes with her, then the trap can develop in several ways. A crude



Photo: Unsplash

honey trap would be where the male is drugged or beaten and then robbed. A more intricate honey trap would involve the man being videoed having sex with the female, the more deviant the better, and then blackmailed for favors or hard currency.

Some honey traps can go on for an extended period of time and can form into what the male believes is a relationship; this will continue until the controllers or criminals behind the trap get the information or results they are after. Another criminal tactic is to use a mature-looking but underage girl or boy as the bait, that way they have a lot of leverage on the male who has unknowingly committed a serious criminal act, sex with a minor. Think about it, how many guys do you know who would say NO if you gave them a gift of an afternoon in a decent hotel room with two attractive young ladies who were there to please?

Now I am sure most security professionals would say they would never do such things while on a detail or in life in general, but I will say they are talking BS. Boys will be boys, I understand this and know that some men when away from their wives, families, and regular environments will take every opportunity to party. This has been common practice in the most professional of organizations, as evidenced by the U.S. Secret Service scandal of 2012.

I once got a short-term job in a conservative Middle Eastern country for someone I worked with on the circuit in London. He is former British army and had a good career in the British Police. He has an accomplished background and also an addiction to

Tinder, which I thought would have been blocked in the country we were in. When not working he was doing his best to meet up with and try to sleep with any woman that would have him, even though unmarried couples caught having relations in that country would lead to both parties being thrown in jail. In this situation the only person he was a danger to was himself, and to be honest, if he had gotten himself arrested, apart from it being highly amusing for me, it would have been a good introduction to the real world for him after his career in the sheltered environments of the British military and police.

So, from a management point of view you need to ensure your people are experienced and mature enough not to be tempted by any woman that looks in their direction. In Eastern Europe it's not uncommon to get prostitutes phoning your hotel room offering their services, your details supplied by their associates working in the hotel. Would you say no? Would the people you're working with say no?

Whether prostitutes are found online, at a strip bar, or supplied by another sources, they can all bring big problems, not only disease but also robbery and blackmail. The U.S. Secret Service had major issues in 2012 in Cartagena, Colombia. The agents were stupid enough to take prostitutes they met in a night club to their hotel rooms where they had their weapons, presidential security plans, phones and computers, etc. There are plenty of "by the hour" hotels in Colombia, so why take a hooker to your hotel? The less your new friend knows about you the better, even if

you are in love!

Their behavior can only be described as completely stupid, and the whole affair came to light after they refused to pay a girl her agreed fee and she called the cops on them. In many places the police provide security and act as enforcers for sex workers; they earn some extra money or favors in return. Maybe in this case the agents would have been better off in the short term if the girl's protectors were Cartel and not local police, but in the long term favors would have needed to be returned; nothing is ever free!

Again, asking from a management point of view: Would a security detail for a senior Cartel member be put in the same situation as the Secret Service agents? I think not. I am sure, if required, they would have access to trusted women in a neutral location. I am also sure that if they committed the same security negligence as the U.S. agents, they would be lucky to just get a bullet in the head.

Five-star hotels and exclusive venues are always a favored hangout for attractive women seeking to better themselves and make some hard currency in the process. Be it London, Paris, Miami, or Port Harcourt, these ladies will not be hard to find. One funny story that could have led to big problems involves a gentleman I know who exchanged phone numbers with a very attractive lady he met in a high-end hotel lobby in West Africa. After an evening exchanging texts, he invited the girl to his hotel room. When she got there, an argument quickly broke out because he did not realize he had to pay for her time. I think his ego was hurt. He ended up,

when the situation was made clear to him, paying the girl, which was the right thing to do. He was dumb and had wasted her time; for her it was business, and if he just wanted a conversation, he should have Skyped his wife.

A lot of the sex business is run by organized crime, and in a lot of places, as I have said, the police provide protection for the venues and the girls. The criminals and police also use the girls to provide them with intelligence on potential targets for blackmail, extortion, or kidnapping. With a call to her friends in the police, our dumb friend's actions in West Africa could have caused him and maybe the rest of the security team a lot of third-world problems, which would have cost everyone a lot more than the girl's fee

to make her go away.

Now think about this scenario: You're in your hotel room in a developing country, and there is a knock on your door. When you answer it, there are the hotel manager and two police officers who ask to search your room. Are you going to say no? Can you say no? When they look under your bed, they find an illegal handgun; hopefully they give you an option to pay a fine and not just drag you off to a third-world prison? Do you think anyone will believe the gun was not yours? There are three witnesses who were present when it was found. So, how could an illegal weapon (or drugs or child porn) end up in your hotel room? Well, maybe via any attractive young ladies your team has decided to entertain.

Think about what you would do

in your own country if your car was broken into or you came home one day to find your front door has been forced open. Call the cops? Most people would wait for the cops to turn up and then make entry into the house, or let the cops check for fingerprints, etc. But what's going to happen if the cops enter your house and find illegal drugs or look under your car seat and find a firearm that hopefully for your sake has not been used in a crime. In some obvious breakins, you need to be more concerned about things being put in place rather than what's been taken!

In many places the police, judges, and legal system are for hire and at the service of the highest bidder or the best connected. One good example of this was highlighted to me when I

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was offered a security job in a fairly remote part of Eastern Europe, again in the late 1990s, for clients who had a dispute with a local governor over some very valuable assets. At the time I had very good contacts in the country who made it very clear to me there was no way to provide security in that region.

We could hire the most capable people in that area, but even though they would be working for us, they answered to that region's governor. Their families, their jobs, and their whole lives were there. Would they risk all of this for a short-term contact? I know they wouldn't! It was in their best interest to take our money but then to inform on us and work against our interests.

So, why not take in a security detail from another area? Well, we did not think it would take long before they were arrested for some reason. Again, the governor controlled the region, which meant the police, courts, and judges. There would be no need for Hollywood shootouts; the whole security detail could be arrested by a superior number of well-armed police on trumped up weapons charges, drugs charges, etc. I am sure after a few days of being abused in prison and in media headlines declaring the illegal activities of these guns for hire, the judge would do his duty and give them a long custodial sentence. This would also highlight to the client that it would be in his interests to just comply with the governor's wishes and live happy ever after. So I did not take the job.

So, hopefully you can see from this short article there are a lot of

real threats out there that need to be taken into consideration when working a security detail, more than just the threat of physical assault. A lot of the issues I have highlighted here can occur in Western Europe and the U.S.; you don't have to be in one of today's high-risk countries. If your threat assessment identifies a threat from serious criminals, you need to consider and plan for all possible threats, put yourself in the criminal's shoes, and think how you would target yourself. Always remember, if you can't solve a problem with money, then you can always solve it with a lot of money... but it's better still to just avoid the issues than hope you have enough cash available to solve them!

Since leaving the British army in 1993, Mr. Wilson has worked in South and West Africa, Western and Eastern Europe, the U.S., the Middle East, Latin America, and the Caribbean and coordinated projects in many other countries. His experience has ranged from providing close protection/bodyguard services for Middle Eastern Royal families and varied corporate clients to kidnap and ransom services, corporate intelligence, and paramilitary training for private individuals, tactical police units, and government agencies. •

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Discussing security in Laghman province, 3 August 2011. Photo by: Staff Sgt. Ryan Crane

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