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U.S., allies must hone terror defenses

BY DORON BERGERBEST

TEL AVIV, Israel — In the five years since 9/11, the United States and its allies have managed to foil scores of plots, including the recent plan by home-grown British terrorists to blow as many as 10 American airliners out of the skies.

Despite those successes, security forces engaged in the global war on terror cannot afford to rest on their laurels.

Recent events in the Middle East and Europe suggest the terrorists' enablers in Iran and Syria are orchestrating an aggressive global jihad — one that may unleash a wave of new attacks likely to make 9/11 pale by comparison. This escalation of terrorism is an attempt to psychologically bludgeon the West into abandoning its demands that Iran end its nuclear weapons program.

Consider just a few of the recent troubling incidents as we enter the final weeks of this long, hot summer:

- The rulers of Iran moved forward on their plans to develop nuclear weapons, ignoring cease-and-desist calls from the United States, Europe and the United Nations. Ominously, they escalated their public rhetoric as well, threatening to annihilate both Israel and America.
- Hezbollah, operating from fortified bunkers in southern Lebanon, launched the first ever sustained and indiscriminate missile bombardment targeting Israeli civilians — firing off more than 6,000 Katisha rockets supplied shipped by Iran through a complicit Syria.
- German national police apprehended two Islamic men with two large suitcases packed with a variety of containers filled with gasoline at the train station in the northern industrial city of Kiel. The arrests were made after detonators designed to trigger the explosives failed to work.
- The takeover of the Palestinian government by the radical Hamas organization, who then opted out of ongoing peace negotiations with Israel and returned to a policy of unprovoked violence.

U.S. and European officials must heed these ominous events and respond by swiftly beefing up their own defenses. Their best minds must come together to devise plans that will allow them — literally — to outsmart this new challenge.

From my long experience in helping plan Israel's successful security strategies, here are a few measures I would recommend for quick implementation:

First, the Department of Homeland Security must find the correct balance between incoming intelligence and ongoing security tactics. The United States must not return to a situation where homeland security levels are dictated by day-to-day intelligence. The working assumption for security officials must be that terror attacks will occur without prior intelligence warnings. Homeland security must take advantage of all available

information to base our defenses on realistic threat definitions that translate into continual operation awareness.

Second, the United States must significantly strengthen its intelligence capabilities at the state and local levels. Establishing broader ties with patriotic Muslims willing to watch for terrorists seeking cover in their communities must be a priority. It should be noted that much of the success of Britain's security services in recent weeks came from tips provided by concerned Muslim citizens.

Third, homeland security at the state and local levels should be handled by experienced professionals who have long and successful track records as field agents — people who rose through the ranks of outfits like the U.S. Secret Service and the FBI. My own career began as an airport screener while I was still a college student, and this hands-on experience proved invaluable.

Fourth, Western security officials need to do a better job of ensuring quality assurance. In the United States, for instance, states are investing large sums in homeland security programs. How do we know these investments are well spent? Security officials at all levels should institute security auditing and "red teaming," a concept where security agents are trained to view things from the perspective of the terrorist.

Finally, U.S. officials must tighten the confidentiality of their security operations. While Americans are used to having their government practice the commendable philosophy of transparency and openness, the United States shouldn't publicly lay out our precautionary measures and planned responses on a table for all to see. To put it in boxing terms, America simply can't afford to telegraph its punches.

Although it's painful to acknowledge, the terrorists actually planned using out-of-the-box thinking and executing it professionally — surprising security agencies in the United States on 9/11. They continued to seek similar successes in Spain with the 2004 Madrid train bombings and in Britain with last year's attacks on the London transit system — although these were not of the same scale, creativity and impact.

To stop a new wave of terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction, the West must now turn tables on the terrorists and outsmart them by ramping up its security to new levels of awareness. It can be done, but given the recent warning signals, there's no time to lose.

Doron Bergerbest is the former head of the Israeli Security Agency's Protection and a Security Division, where he served from 1983 to 2005.