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Trends. Thinking on Transportation Security

Editor

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Abstract: This Trends article discusses the necessity of gathering intelligence successfully to combat terrorism as it pertains to commerce.

Operation Safe Commerce is a United States Government (USG) program intended to decrease the probability of a successful terrorist operation targeting US assets and interests. One way in which this intent is operationalized is through allocating money for improving security of container shipments involving the US' largest container ports of entry. Related security programs bring the largest foreign ports on board as security partners with the US.

There are at least several significant assumptions behind these initiatives. One is that attending to the biggest and busiest ports ensures the greatest security impact per security dollar. This assumption only holds, however, if there is a random distribution of threat across all port venues or if the biggest and the busiest ports display a more significant threat per each port activity than smaller and less busy venues. A second assumption is that specific security activities at any particular port would, indeed, have a salutary effect on terrorism. This assumption, of course, depends on the match of security activity to threat and belies the possibility that a security activity could even exacerbate threat. A third assumption is that the publicization of a program like Safe Commerce has both a deterrent effect on terrorism and on the anxiety generated among a target public by the threat of terrorism. However, publicization can alert terrorist planners of where and what to avoid and can exacerbate, as well as deter or reduce, public anxiety through the ineluctable validation of the existence of the terrorist threat. A fourth assumption is that the very expenditure of resources bears positive consequences for the target of terrorism as opposed to negative consequences--the latter exemplified through terrorists having induced their target to expend resources that better could be better expended on health, education, and other important needs of a citizenry.

Antiterrorism and counterterrorism initiatives ultimately must depend on strong intelligence programs--as to information collected, analyzed, produced, and transmitted to security authorities. Without strong intelligence, other security initiatives depend only on blind luck. (See Bohart, A.C. (2002). The feeling of realness: Evil and meaning making. *Humanistic Psychologist*, 30, 239-251; Border, K. C., & Segal, U. (2002). Coherent odds and subjective probability. *Journal of Mathematical Psychology*, 46, 253-268; Derry, S. J., Levin, J. R., Osana, H. P., Jones, M. S., & Peterson, M. (2000). Fostering students' statistical and scientific thinking: Lessons from an innovative college course. *American Educational Research Journal*, 37, 747-773; Farrow, S., & Hayakawa, H. (2002). Investing in safety: An analytical precautionary principle. *Journal of Safety Research*, 33, 165-174; US DOT: DOT and customs launch 'Operation Safe Commerce' program. (November 21, 2002). M2 Presswire.) (Keywords: Intelligence, Operation Safe Commerce, Security Initiatives, Terrorism.)