



Preparing the Private Sector for Responding to Civil Unrest

Recent civil unrest in cities across the United States has building owners, schools administrators, healthcare leaders, corporate executives, business owners, and board members of condo and homeowners associations questioning whether the security measures they have used for years or decades are still sufficient to protect their property in light of the changing threat environment.

SECURITY, A SITUATIONAL DISCIPLINE

In these unprecedented times is your business prepared to deal with the changing landscape of potential crises. Not only have businesses had to shift their practices to adjust to restrictions attempting to slow the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic all while dealing with major disruptions to their supply chains and revenue streams, but in many locations business owners must contend with increasingly volatile situations due to social unrest.

Almost every week the cable news channels are inundating us with footage of the latest peaceful protest in the wake of a shooting by police or other tragic event that has ended up devolving into a full blown riot with access to entire parts of cities being shut down, businesses being looted, and buildings and cars being burned.

As with almost all elements of an organization's security program an organization's level of preparedness and mitigation for civil disturbances must be predicated on the organization's unique risk exposure to them. A hospital, corporate office, or high-rise condominium located downtown in a major city necessarily requires a higher level of preparedness for this type of event than does a rural K-12 school district or an oil refinery on Alaska's North Slope.

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Bob and Drew serve as the leadership team and Principal Consultants for Security Advisors Consulting Group, a consulting firm which offers security assessment, training, and litigation support services.

Drew and Bob are both well-established security professionals who bring a wealth of knowledge to any project. Both have served as the senior most Security executive (CSO) for companies in multiple industries including healthcare, education, and financial services. Have presented to security and other industry groups and have published articles and whitepapers on a number of security and violence prevention related subjects.

Both hold master's degrees, Bob in Criminal Justice Administration and Drew an Executive MBA in International Business. They each also hold the Certified Protection Professional (CPP) designation from ASIS International, and Drew is certified in the practical application of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).



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Security is a situational discipline, and the organization must adjust the mitigation measures its Security program uses to the risks that are presented by the organization's location, business, asset types, and customer and employee demographics. These risks can vary drastically even for businesses that outwardly appear remarkably similar, risks faced by a healthcare organization with a hospital in a bustling downtown area of a major city are vastly different than those faced by a hospital in a small town in the rural Midwest, and those faced by an upscale retirement community are very different than those of a public housing project, or those of an apartment complex located across the street from the football stadium on the campus of a major university.

An Enterprise Security Risk Management (ESRM) Framework is essential to the development of an effective and efficient security program. In ESRM we must first identify an organization's assets, then what actors present a reasonable threat to those assets, the likelihood that the threats will impact the asset, and the impact to the organization if they do. We then develop measures to reduce either the likelihood or the impact of the threat if it occurs, and periodically reassess the effectiveness of our mitigation measures.

Enterprise Security Risk Management Framework



Use of an Enterprise Security Risk Management (ESRM) Framework is essential to understanding and mitigating security risks to your organization.

Once the risks faced by an organization are understood, a security program is tasked with developing relevant mitigation measures or program elements to reasonably reduce the risk of these crimes occurring, the frequency at which they occur, or their impact if they do occur.

Here are a few simple things to take into consideration when considering appropriate mitigation measures for response to threats posed by civil unrest that may impact your business.

- Is there a clear process and designation of who can make the decision to close the business and send employees home before the disturbance makes that impossible, and what factors should go into making that decision? Does your plan account for road closures, public transportation disruptions, power outages, National Guard checkpoints?
- Does your organization engage in active open source intelligence (OSINT) monitoring? This can be as simple as monitoring social media and local news sources that can alert you to potential disturbances that may impact your operations, or can be more complex involving qualified Intelligence Analysts using sophisticated tools and filtering information from their networks of contacts in both the private and public sectors, or somewhere in between.



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- Do you have an effective emergency communications system in place that will allow you to notify staff, and for schools students, to stay home from facilities that you expect to be impacted, or if they are already at your facilities when it is safe to leave and what routes are safe for them to take to get home?
- If only some of your locations are in areas where there is a significant risk of civil unrest do you understand the impact on the rest of your business if they are forced to close early or cannot function for several days, do you need redundant operations to reduce the likelihood of a disruption at one location impacting the operations of the entire company?
- Do you have a method to quickly and securely lock your exterior doors if the situation outside becomes untenable, or do you rely on staff or a Security Officer to go around your building using a physical key to lock each door. While this may be workable in some instances, in others depending on the number of doors and other things that your Security may be engaged in at the time may makes this impractical.
- Do you understand how your local police will respond to a civil disturbance? Are their instructions likely to be stand down and only intervene in cases of potential loss of life allowing destruction of property to go unchecked, or will they react with force and potentially escalate and prolong the situation? While their plans may be dictated by the situation, having some idea of how they may react can inform your preparations.
- Do you have uniformed Security Officers on your property? If so, what instructions have they been given for interacting with rioters, and are they able to differentiate between rioters who are posing a danger to your property and peaceful protestors who may be temporarily disturbing your operations as they pass through but do not pose a danger? With current levels of anti-police sentiment Security Officer in a “police style” uniform can unintentionally escalate a situation very easily.
- If you do have Security personnel, what direction have they been given regarding use of force to stop property damage? Are they armed with firearms or less lethal weapons, and if so when are they allowed to engage rather than retreat?
- Are your business’ surveillance cameras located so that you can view what is occurring on the streets outside of your establishment or campus without having to peak out a window or open a door? If so, are they appropriately protected by being placed where they are not easily reached and/or installed in a vandal resistant housing to prevent them from being destroyed or disabled?



Security Officers protecting a corporate office building in downtown Minneapolis during disturbances in the wake of the death of George Floyd while he was in the custody of Minneapolis Police.





- If your building has glass storefront windows or doors at street level, are these constructed of laminate glass or treated with a security film to prevent them from being broken out of their frames? If not, are there options for you to alter the environment outside of the window to restrict the ability of a person to stand in a position that would allow them the leverage to swing an object with any force at the window?
- Is the potential for civil disturbance great enough to consider installing steel security shutters or bars on the inside or outside of the window? If your municipality does not allow these, does it make sense for you to have pre-cut fire-resistant plywood on hand to board up windows quickly?
- Does your organization have property on the sidewalks outside of your location? In response to the COVID-19 pandemic many restaurants have increased their capacity for outside dining and retailers have placed racks or merchandise outside to assist with social distancing guidelines. Do your staff know what should be done with any property outside in the case of a civil disturbance? Should it be left to be damaged or destroyed, if not do you have a place where it can be moved to quickly? Does outdoor dining furniture, clothing racks, or other items of yours make a readily available tool for breaking windows, forcing open doors, or assaulting police officers?
- If you do not have your own Security staff, do you have an agreement in place with a third party Security provider who can provide Security Officers to watch your building and prevent further damage and looting should your doors or windows be broken in a civil disturbance? We see that after civil unrest third party contracted Security Officers are in short supply, companies that have agreements in place are typically provided personnel prior to those that are just reaching out to a security provider for the first time once the incident has occurred.
- If all else fails and your building is damaged by acts of civil unrest, does your company carry an insurance policy that will assist you in restoring the damages. Many business liability insurance portfolios do not cover civil disturbances, so it is important to understand the limitations of your policies.



Window planters such as these can provide a limited protection from window breakage by making it more difficult for a person at street level to swing an object at the window with any amount of force.

We hope that your business is never effected by a civil unrest, but if it is hopefully having thought through these items and other contingencies will help reduce the impact.



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