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Could mass shootings in America be prevented by Israel-style profiling?

by Simone Wilson
November 7, 2013 | 9:40 am



Police escort a man in a wheelchair toward medical help during an incident in which shots were fired at Los Angeles International Airport on Nov. 1. Photo by KNBC/Reuters

With each horrific mass shooting that devastates another town in America, we are presented with a flood of news stories and think pieces, reflecting on how this could have happened — *again*. And how, they ask, can we stop the deadly cycle: Gun control? Mental health care? Community togetherness?

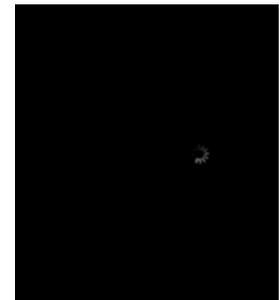
At least two Israeli security experts, both of whom formerly patrolled Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport and now work as security consultants in the U.S., said the key point of intervention may lie in the moments leading up to the crime.

On the heels of [the LAX airport shooting last week that killed a Transportation Security Administration \(TSA\) officer](#), and the [New Jersey mall attack this week](#), Israeli-born Rafi Ron, speaking to [CNN](#) and [PBS](#), and Michael Rozin, speaking to the Jewish Journal, said this type of attack could possibly be prevented using Israel-style security measures, which take a more intensive and personalized approach to spotting potential attackers in public spaces.

The Israeli method is based on suspect profiling — an especially touchy subject among civil-liberty advocates in the U.S.

The TSA is already one of the most hated governmental agencies in America, for the hands-on security measures it does impose. Tellingly,

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LAPD Chief Charlie Beck, in defense of his officers' failure to catch 23-
 HOLLYWOOD CULTURE BLOGS INFO allegedly started shooting up LAX last Friday, partially blamed America's aversion to strict security:

"We can search every car like a military checkpoint at gunpoint and make it impossible for [a shooting] to happen," Beck said. "But it would take days to get into LAX, and people are not ready for that."

"Neither am I," he added.

... Beck, speaking with reporters following Tuesday's Police Commission meeting, said most people aren't prepared for the "intrusive security" that would be required to prevent an attack.

Rozin, however, argued that "your rights are a lot more infringed when you're exposed to violence than when you're answering security questions." And he said that tightening security measures at U.S. malls and airports wouldn't necessarily mean ordering new shipments of expensive, intrusive body scanners or hiring hundreds more officers. Instead, he recommended that all existing security personnel on the premises should be better trained to "identify things in the crowd that indicate malicious intent."



In Israel, Rozin served in a specialized combat unit of the IDF, trained under the Israeli Security Agency (Shin Bet) and worked as a security agent at Ben Gurion Airport. In the U.S., he runs [Rozin Security Consulting](#), a Minneapolis-based risk management and security services firm. In a phone

interview, Rozin told me that, generally speaking, security training in the U.S. puts a bigger emphasis on identifying a weapon and reacting to an attack, as opposed to identifying malicious intent and preventing the attack before it occurs.

There are two factors that lead to an act of public violence, said Rozin: 1) a weapon and 2) intent.

"We focus on intent," he said. "In Israel, we don't ignore the weapon — of course we have measures to [screen for weapons] — but we put more focus on identifying malicious intent. In the U.S., a lot of the strategy is to wait for something to happen and then respond. The focus is on identifying a weapon. If you pass the metal detector, you must be good. While we do use metal detectors [in Israel], they're only secondary. People are looking you in your eyes and watching your behavior. That's the element that's missing."

From personal experience, entering Ben Gurion Airport is like being sucked into a sterile security vacuum: I feel I'm being watched and studied from every angle before I even reach the front door. And once inside, if I even look at the flight board funny, a uniformed official will come up and start asking questions. How long have you been here? Why did you come here? Where are you going? The same one-on-one questioning is repeated in a security line that passengers must walk through before they even reach the carry-on and suitcase screening area. And once security officers see the Gaza stamp in my passport, I'm in for another 20 minutes of hard interrogation. These guys can smell the tiniest white lie from clear across the airport — it's insane.

Ron, former head of security at Ben Gurion, told [PBS](#):

"I don't think that the level of threat here in the U.S. is similar to the one in Israel and it requires the, I would say, far reaching solutions. It isn't. But at the same time, we cannot neglect all these areas, the public areas of the airport, whether it is on the curbside and the public lobbies and the public side of the checkpoint, because this is the area where things can happen."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Simone Wilson is a journalist from North California currently in Tel Aviv, Israel. She serves as chief of UC San Diego student newspaper, [Read more](#)

Israel has been bashed halfway into the Mediterranean for its airport profiling. This is a Jewish and Israeli issue. In the 20 years of elevator eyes and interrogations they receive at Ben Gurion as the price of their own security, they're also not the ones [being pulled into windowless rooms for seven hours](#), treated as terrorists and kicked out of the country.

But what Ron and Rozin are talking about goes beyond racial profiling. (And really, if U.S. security guards wanted to profile mass shooters on race alone, all they'd have to do is watch out for white, male 20somethings with Jack Torrance glares.)

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As Ron explained to [NPR](#) back in 2010:

We use profiling. It is not the racial profiling. It is profiling that takes into consideration where somebody comes from, and if somebody's home address is Gaza, we should be paying more attention to details compared to, for example, a Holocaust survivor from Tel Aviv.

... One of the problems with racial profiling is that there's a tendency to believe that this is the silver bullet to solve the problem. In other terms, if you're a Middle Eastern or if you're a Muslim, then you must be bad. And if you're a European and Christian, then you must be good.

But back in 1972, Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv was supposed to be attacked by a Palestinian, was never attacked by one. It was attacked by a Japanese terrorist killing 24 people. And it was attacked in the mid-'80s by a German terrorist answering to the name Miller.

Israel learned from those attacks, Rozin told the Jewish Journal. Now, based on the Israeli standard, he teaches his clients — including the security detail at Mall of America — to profile based on suspicious factors in appearance, attire (such as clothing that could conceal a weapon), body language, behavior (such as reaction to a security presence) and other telltale actions.

"Eight out of 10 people have certain activities before an attack," said Rozin. "[The shooter] knows he's going to engage in a shooting. He knows his life will be in danger. He is carrying a weapon — he appears different, he acts different. You just need a trained professional who can identify him."

For example, he said, Al Qaeda-linked "shoe bomber" Richard Reid was subjected to an intensive search in Israel in 2011, during what was believed to have been a test run through Israel's El Al Airlines before his attempted attack on American Airlines. "Security personnel considered Reid a high risk and checked his luggage, his person and his shoes before he was allowed to board the aircraft," the [Telegraph](#) reported at the time.

I also asked Rozin about the differences between spotting a more traditional "terrorist," by Western definition, and an active shooter.

He answered: "When you're talking about sophisticated terrorist groups, their implementation phase is larger and longer. There is a lot of effort studying the targets... and they're better at concealing suspicious actions." However, he added that "while [terrorists and shooters] are different, with different weapons and different ideologies, the bottom line is, it doesn't really matter in the moment. They have a weapon and they intend to use it to cause harm."

Atlantic columnist Jeffrey Goldberg nailed it in 2010 [when he wrote that](#) "the coiled, closely packed lines at TSA screening sites are the most dangerous places in airports, completely unprotected from a terrorist attack."

Indeed, the LAX shooter chose the screening line as his point of impact. But had trained eyes been on the shooter from the moment he arrived at the airport, said Rozin, there's a chance he wouldn't have even made it that far.

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Jimmy Givens

This is a very informative article and Americans should heed the advice of these professionals. I have one question: "How can a TSA or ANY security officer spot a terrorist/shooter if they don't look at the people. Today's society has forgotten (or never learned) how to "look a person in the eye"... consequently there's no "Eye to Eye Contact" (ala Edwin Starr). If people would look at other people just HALF as intently as they do their texting, etc. they would be surprised at what they see and have been missing. Enough of my rambling. We need to learn before it becomes too late! ;-)

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Reuven M. Rosenberg · Top Commenter · Bet Shemesh, Israel

<http://live.wsj.com/video/how-israel-screens-for-terrorists/987D025A-145D-42F5-9756-7B43CC7613CE.html#987D025A-145D-42F5-9756-7B43CC7613CE>

Reply · Like · January 11 at 2:43pm



Josephine Bacon · Top Commenter · London, United Kingdom

Well, this might work in some cases but not all. The Scotsman responsible for the shootings in Dunblane was considered unsuitable by all the authorities to hold a gun license and he was refused a license on every occasion. This did not stop him getting hold of a gun and shooting people at random. Mass shootings can be heavily reduced in America, how did the kids at Columbine High manage to get hold of weapons? Assault weapons should be banned throughout the United States (yeah, I can just see that happening with the gun lobby!) and the same laws that prevail in the UK can be introduced into the USA for owning guns of any kind.

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