

# Tackling terror

by David Eadie

## Before, during and after, procurement responds to threats and emergencies

**H**OW QUICKLY CAN Canada respond to terrorist threats? Increasingly, counter-terrorism is calling on information technology and advanced electronics to detect and neutralize attacks before they happen. But terrorists have demonstrated the ability to attack unexpectedly almost anywhere. Are today's procurement systems fast and flexible enough to meet tomorrow's threats?

### Tanker tip

A recent alert warned that tanker trucks carrying gasoline, fuel oil, or any of a number of explosive, corrosive or toxic gasses could easily be hijacked and detonated in populated or otherwise critical areas. US media reported, "Al-Qaeda terrorists are plotting to drive hijacked fuel tankers into petrol stations in an effort to cause mass casualties in London and US cities in the next few weeks," but it takes very little imagination to broaden the types of loads that might be contained in the tankers or possible targets. Despite "the FBI cautioning that the source of the information was not necessarily reliable," authorities in Britain and the US took immediate action.

Within days of the warning a comprehensive series of measures to address the threat were initiated including installing remote-controlled shut-down devices to stop any tanker if it is hijacked, security training for relevant staff of tanker fleet operators, putting tracking devices on petrol tankers to monitor their movements. The story is still evolving and by this time there may or may not be an attack or attempted attack by Al-Qaeda or other terrorists somewhere in the West using tanker trucks.

The reaction to the tanker alert illus-

trates how vulnerable the West is to determined and imaginative attackers and how quickly technological solutions can be implemented. Procurement officers know that any action, fast or slow, must have approvals and funding in place. At least in the US and Britain, there was a well funded procurement system in place to hire the security trainers, purchase the equipment, have people install it, more to operate it and still more people to administer the whole operation. What's more, and the most impressive aspect, it was accomplished within days of the alert being issued.

### DND blues

Could the Department of National Defence react to such a threat? General Paul Manson (ret'd), former Chief of Defence Staff (1977-80) and current President of the Conference of Defence Associations Institute answered, "No." And why? "Because it takes so long."

"Over the past 20 or 30 years, Manson said, "the length of time for a major Crown project has increased dramatically to the point where the system is quite dysfunctional." Interdepartmental negotiations. Committee meetings. Requests for Proposals. Evaluations. Memoranda to Cabinet. Approvals. And through all this, the project can be derailed by a political decision that may have nothing at all to do with the merits of the project or the need that it is intended to fill. Even "off the shelf" items can take up to five years to reach the field.

According to Gen. Manson, defence procurements are not simple. "DND has to get formal approval from a broad array of other government departments, all of whom

want to assert their own prerogative in the design and execution of a major procurement," he said. Add the well-intentioned desire to ensure Canadian content in the design and manufacture of items and the process expands to the five-to-fifteen year time frame it takes for larger DND procurements. Initially approved in the early 1980s, the latest estimate for delivery of the Canadian Navy's ship-borne helicopter is 2010, nearly thirty years.

### On the rails in Toronto

The commuter train bombing in Madrid and two waves of attacks on the London Underground demonstrated the vulnerability of public mass transit – and the inability of video cameras to prevent attacks.

Vincent Rodo, general manager of the Toronto Transit Commission's Executive Branch, is well aware of the limited usefulness of video surveillance in preventing attacks. Nevertheless, the TTC plans to purchase additional video equipment as well as increased awareness training for their 10,000 employees. The TTC had been looking at upgrading their system for some time and their procurement process was already underway at the time of the bombings. "London galvanized our interest," says Rodo.

The process is faster than DND's bureaucratic marathon, but because funding is split between the city, the province and the federal government, there are inevitably delays while all parties satisfy their various agendas and procedural requirements. But there is a fast track if absolutely needed.



“If it’s deemed to be an absolutely critical thing,” says Rodo, “we get the head of the commission to meet with the mayor or the premier or the prime minister and deal with them directly. We won’t sit back. If it’s a critical issue, you get your politicians involved at the political level.” As far as the TTC is concerned, the difficult and time-consuming part of the procurement process is deciding on the right course of action. “Some of the things you might change could have far-reaching consequences,” Rodo says, “You can fix one thing and make a thousand things worse. Sometimes what looks like a quick and easy solution might be the wrong thing to do.”

### **CATSA – assuming a position**

Sometimes, of course, politicians and the public decide any action is better than no action at all. Michael McLaughlin is vice president and CFO with the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA). “You’ve got to assess the situation. You get the best information you can. You make a decision and you move with it and if you have to reverse you have to reverse. To stand on the spot and twiddle your thumbs isn’t acceptable,” he said.

CATSA was created within months of September 11<sup>th</sup> to provide key air security services such as: pre-board screening of passengers and their belongings; the acquisition, deployment and maintenance of explosives detection equipment at airports; federal contributions for airport policing related to civil aviation security initiatives; and contracting for police on board aircraft.

This spring’s Auditor General’s Report raised questions about screening of passengers and baggage and the lack of system-wide performance standards. The Auditor’s upcoming ‘value for money’ special examination of CATSA is expected to touch more fully on these issues. Likely to receive a hard look is the Restricted Area Identification Card (RAIC) system that combines biometrics with an access-control system. In procurement terms it’s an example of how a Crown corporation such as CATSA can get sophisticated big-ticket technology in place in a relatively short time period. In slightly over two years RAIC has progressed from a perceived need to completed pilot projects.

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Michael McLaughlin says the process is fairly straightforward. First the agency defines the need, determines the functionality of equipment or services they're going to procure and then goes to a short list of approved suppliers. CATSA can only use equipment certified by Transport Canada and engages in the normal RFP process. "They send us their specifications, pricing and date of delivery; we evaluate their proposals and decide on a supplier and issue a contract," he says. "If it's a new piece of equipment then you're looking 60 to 90 days to have something in the bid process."

Like the TTC, CATSA has a fast track process. "If we had a particular situation that we thought was a threat to national security, we have the powers to move very quickly to procure whatever we need to get rid of or address that particular threat as long as it was in our mandate to address it," he says. CATSA does not require bureaucratic or political approval for purchases under one million dollars, he says. "Greater than a million dollar purchase, we would go through our board of directors and get their approval." How timely is this? "We can get the board of directors together within a couple of days notice in an emergency of that sort – it could be a matter of hours if it was something we thought we could really address quickly through a purchase order for a piece of equipment." And does the fast track system work? Mr. McLaughlin acknowledges that there has been a perceived threat situation that required immediate action and which entailed the acquisition of a security device but security forbids going into detail. Likewise security will likely prevent significant details being made public from the upcoming Auditor General's 'special investigation.'

Are Canadians getting value for security spending? Is it possible to counter every threat with a technological solution? Paul Benoit, president and CEO of the Ottawa International Airport Authority, says that given the resources and authority, they could make airports virtually 100 percent secure but then terrorists would just find other, less-well defended targets. "Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv," he notes, "is the most secure airport on the planet. So where do the bombs go off? In market places and on buses." *MM*

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