



# SITUATIONAL AWARENESS SWITCHING ON YOUR SECURITY RADAR

By Michael O'Rourke

Romanian tourist Andrei Burnaz admired the stunning view of Parliament and Big Ben from where he stood on Westminster Bridge, his beautiful girlfriend, Andreea Crista, by his side. Burnaz, however, had more on his mind than London's iconic landmarks on this mild and sunny spring afternoon—he planned to propose to Andreea later that day.

He would never get the chance.

At 14:40 on March 22, 2017, a terrorist drove his rented Hyundai 4x4 onto the Westminster Bridge sidewalk and accelerated, quickly reaching speeds of up to 76 mph. Thirty seconds, and approximately 350 meters later, he crashed into the Palace of Westminster's fence. Leaping from the disabled vehicle, he fatally stabbed a policeman before armed police shot him dead. In his wake, Andrei Burnaz lay injured on the bridge along with more than 50 others. Andreea had been hurled

into the River Thames. The thirty-one year old architect would die more than two weeks later. In total, the attack claimed five innocent lives.

Our opinion is that some, though certainly not all, of these deaths and injuries may have been avoided had the people on the bridge employed the principles of situational awareness.

Situational awareness is a heightened mental state of alertness in which individuals observe, process, and react to their surroundings. While sometimes thought of as a skill for spies, one need not be Jason Bourne to adopt this mindset. In fact, doing so is of particular importance for high net worth individuals and families due to the possibility of direct targeting by criminals or terrorists. Fortunately, adopting good situational awareness is a relatively simple three-part

process anyone can master. Deciding one will commit to paying attention at a higher level to the immediate environment is the first step. This is a conscious effort to begin actually observing in detail, and processing, what is seen and heard. Keep at it and these observation skills soon become second nature.

Put into practice, you are looking for anything out of place, encompassing people and objects. Regarding people, you are looking at body language and behaviour. Do they seem aggressive or relaxed? Is someone paying too much attention to you, or walking towards you on a deliberate intercept course? Objects include those both stationary and moving. Why is that package near the event entrance? Is that car driving erratically? Your habits begin to change. You start looking for the nearest exits at each venue upon arrival, and you begin sitting facing the door to observe who enters.

Vanquishing denial is next. Denial, already with an impressive body count, can kill you. "It will never happen to me" and "nothing ever happens here" are among the final thoughts of people in denial. Fireworks do not go off in airports, hotels, or markets. That popping noise is always gunfire until proven otherwise. Until denial is defeated, you will be at war with your natural survival instinct, which is the third component.

Often called a "gut feeling", your survival instinct is that hunter-gatherer part of your brain still performing its Ice Age job to warn you of danger. Even the most sophisticated among us still possess this primitive instinct. Our modern world, however, sees many of us suppressing this vital function. Why? Many violent encounter victims report fear of condemnation for profiling their attackers based on race, ethnicity, or

socioeconomic status overcame the feeling of danger. I encourage profiling that is based upon behavioural and situational factors. If something seems out of place or feels wrong, it usually is. Give yourself permission to trust your gut. It could save your life.

Employing a personal security detail should not dissuade individuals and families from the situational awareness mindset. Often, children of wealth travel unaccompanied during gap years or their time at university, yet they may become targets in their own right. Other family members may only move with a detail at certain times and not at others. Terrorist or criminal surveillance will detect this vulnerability.

Making situational awareness a part of daily life requires discipline, especially early on. Think of it as a relaxed alertness. Professional training can ensure the mindset becomes second nature rapidly and can be accomplished in as little as a single day.

The investment pays dividends immediately as your surroundings come into sharper focus. The amount of new detail noticed, and the additional confidence acquired ensures you never see the world in the same way again.

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