

Food Terrorism

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ABSTRACT

Terrorism is the premeditated use of violence or intimidation by individuals or groups to obtain a political or religious objective. Food terrorism is an intentional contamination of the food intended to inflict harm, cause illness/death, or produce mass food poisoning. It is an old concept that uses food as a weapon of attack. The main terrorists can resort to food terrorism. Their intention is to injure members of the population at large. This paper provides a brief introduction to food terrorism.

KEYWORDS: food terrorism, food defense, biological terrorism, agro terrorism

INTRODUCTION

The food industry plays a critical role in every nation because it provides agricultural products that are essential for life. Access to food for all people at all times is important to ensure the satisfaction of a community and global peace. Food insecurity can lead to riots and urban unrest. Global peace means a decrease in transnational terrorism.

Potential threats to the food supply include natural outbreaks of crop and livestock diseases, the intentional adulteration of food to gain illicit profits, and deliberate terrorist attacks against livestock, crops, and food products.

terrorism may be caused by the following reasons [1]. First, food price fluctuations are significant predictors of terrorism within a nation. Second, rapid food price increases trigger terrorist attacks. Third, both country level of economic development and country political regime type amplify or negate the effects of food price volatility on terrorist activity. Government's attempt to eliminate subsidies of basic food items have been observed to increase public protests, violent strikes, or riots. Other reasons include globalization of the food supply, which contributes new risks.

PREVENTING FOOD TERRORISM

Prevention and early detection of a terrorism attack is the best way to address the problem. Food defense is basically the process of protecting the food supply from deliberate contamination as a result of terrorist activity. It should be an integral part of food supply chain since it is far cheaper to prevent an incident from occurring than dealing with the aftermath. Food defense methods seek to prevent deliberate attacks on the food supply and also food fraud, food crime, food adulteration, food contamination, and food tampering [2].

Shortly after the devastating attacks of September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush declared that "our war on terror begins with al-Qaida, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated" [3]. After 9/11, the US increased its efforts for food protection by making coordination of food defense the responsibility of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Food and Drug Administration (FDA)

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An act of terrorism directed at the food and water supply could be devastating. Food terrorism will damage the main economy, especially the agriculture and tourism industries.

Food terrorism is a group of individuals who are intentionally doing something to the food to either cause illness or death on a large scale. They are often politically, socially, or religiously oriented. Food terrorism may also involve food and water contamination with biological, chemical, and physical materials for the purpose of causing injury or death and/or disrupting social, economic or political stability. Intentional food and water contamination has been with us for a very long time. Acts of terrorism using bombs and explosive devices occur around the world. Bombings have been the most commonly used terrorist method of attack. Although food terrorism issues are global, its prevention must start locally. So far there has not been any documented terrorist attack on US agriculture. A terrorist attack on the food supply is possible. An example is *Salmonella* contamination of salad bars in Oregon in the 1980s.

CAUSES OF FOOD TERRORISM

The food supply chain is an attractive, easy target for terrorist attacks. Agriculture/ food industry is one of the seventeen national critical sectors of US economy. Deliberate contamination of food supply may be easier to control than attacks through air or water. This may also have enormous economic and social implications.

Terrorists can utilize the food supply to create fear, cause public harm, and damage food company brand. Food

has authority to act to protect the safety of the nation's food supply. The agency will protect the general public from food terrorism by preparing the agency to take appropriate action in the event of a crisis. FDA has disseminated messages intended to increase the awareness of government agencies, industry representatives, and consumers regarding food terrorism and make good decisions in the event of a food terrorism threat.

The government does not have a single approach to preventing food terrorism. Instead, the agencies work with food producers to work and device schemes to prevent terrorists from infiltrating the food supply [4]. The government agencies (USDA, FDA, DHS, FBI) alone are not solely responsible to prevent food terrorism. Food processors can play a vital role to insure that terrorists do not use food as a weapon. The food industry, regulatory authorities, and consumers must focus on the need for effective food defense systems [5]. Food regulatory officials should enforce preventive measures during regular inspections of food establishments and food importers. Places where food is stored should be secured, and steps taken to prevent adulteration.

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The food industry has the primary responsibility for ensuring that retail food products are safe for consumption. Threats must be taken seriously and acted upon quickly. A structure must be in place to coordinate and handle terrorist. If criminal action is suspected, there must be adequate resources and expertise [6].

CONCLUSION

Food terrorism, possibly caused by accidental or deliberate food contamination, is a real threat to every country that loves freedom. Terrorist elements exist and are active in every nation. Food terrorism is increasingly aided by the globalization of the food supply. It can have far reaching impact on individuals and society and may cause social, economic, and political disruption. Therefore, responsible governments and organizations should not ignore the possibility that terrorists may target the food supply.

Food terrorism is an under-researched phenomenon and there is limited information on the topic. More information about food terrorism can be obtained from the books in [7-8] and also from the journal: *British Food Journal*

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